The Nation.

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L.A. LAWLESS
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EDITORIAL

HOW THE OTHER HALF VOTES

Politicians who snoozed through Carol Moseley Braun's defeat of incumbent Senator Alan Dixon in the Illinois Democratic primary last winter woke up after Lynn Yeakel's easy victory in the April 28 Pennsylvania primary to a shock of eight-point-something on the political Richter scale. But not only conservatives like Dixon (who voted for Clarence Thomas) and Republicans like Arlen Specter (who led the wolf-pack against Anita Hill and will meet Yeakel in the November election) should fear for their seats. The newly energized women's political movement is not amused by liberal men who seduce their vote and then abandon their issues. Gender politics aren't so predictable anymore.

There are currently ten women in the running for Senate seats and perhaps as many as seventy will bid for the House. Although most have primary fights still before them, the odds are turning in the women's favor. Yeakel, who has never run for office (she is a fundraiser for nonprofit women's services), was barely on the charts in Pennsylvania polls as recently as a month before the ballot. Most of the candidates are now saying aloud what many only thought before: Women must speak for themselves in the halls of power, they must articulate all issues across the range of public policy, and "fundamental change" (the buzzword this year) can't begin in America until women win parity with men in politics.

The Democratic presidential candidates have been strangely slow to grasp the new dynamic of gender. As columnist Anna Quindlen complained recently in an open letter to Bill Clinton, "How come you haven't noticed us?"—half the population. It's probably dawning on Clinton that a woman would make a fine running mate. Ann Richards? Pat Schroeder? Barbara Mikulski? Eleanor Holmes Norton? It just might rescue his campaign.

JFK LETTERS (CONCLUDED)
Oliver Stone
John Newman
Philip Green
Wesley J. Liebeler
Alexander Cockburn

JUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA
Diana R. Gordon
Helet Merkling

DETROIT
Camilo José Vergara

HIGH COTTON
Hilton Als

DISCOVERY–*NATION* POETRY WINNERS

GATE FEVER

THE KARMA RAN OVER MY DOGMA

CLANCY SIGAL

My pal Derek, the Liverpool dance hall dynamiter, slugged a screw at Wakefield prison one week before he was due for release. Mollie, who used to deposit her burglary loot with me in brown paper bags and stole the Assistant Police Commissioner's white Mercedes as a fuck-you to established authority, did her best to break the law, any law, after she finished her sentence at Holloway women's prison, where she had discovered her gay identity and lots of warm friends. Here in the States my friend Claud, a permanent U.S. military AWOL, always finds ways of messing up shortly before they parole him from whatever institution he aims for like a beagle in heat.

It's called "gate fever," and I know a lot of people on the left who have it now that the prison gates are unlocked forever.

Speaking for myself, the collapse of Communism—Berlin wall crumbling, Stalin's statues melted down, all that—is a huge load off my dogma-weary shoulders. For years I've been waiting for my release papers. Dreaming of it, working for it, virtually shaping my life toward a New Dawn for Man- and Womankind represented by the discrediting of socialism, my mother's creed and mine.

Arthur Koestler once hinted that the man who gets what he's always wanted will probably plunge into a suicidal depression. Very likely that explains some of what happened to Koestler—a shrewd prophet of anticommunism—after the 1956 Hungarian uprising, which proved he was right all along, that people inevitably will rebel against an "idealistic" tyranny. Of

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EXCHANGE.

A STONE'S THROW

Santa Monica, Calif.

Former Warren Commission assistant counsel Wesley J. Liebeler's defense of his résumé-building work is almost refreshing in its transparency ["Beat the Devil," March 9]. Abetted by Alexander Cockburn's total ignorance of the subject at hand, he improvises, freely associating sources and figures, and offers his opinion that the Warren Commission did a great job, except they got "the entrance wounds in the wrong place." They had the murder on film and some three dozen medical personnel examined the body—but they never did pin down exactly where those wounds were. There goes the whole case: Without knowing where the entrance wounds are, there is absolutely no way to substantiate the lone-gunman thesis.

What we see in the interview is a merging of the far right and the far left for entirely different agendas. Liebeler's operating principle is fairly simple and human: Cover your ass. Cockburn's is philosophical. His dialectic view of history precludes the possibility of individual choice affecting the outcome of events—thus, the very thought that Kennedy might have betrayed his capitalist upbringing by halting the war in Vietnam is unbearable. As Cockburn puts it: "The effect of *JFK* is to make people think that America is a good country that produced a good President killed by bad elites." While that is exactly what I believe, it's a veritable nightmare for Cockburn, who clearly is convinced that a democratic country cannot be good, and could not elect a leader who wasn't merely another link in the inherently evil system.

The Nation joins in the fray with its marvelous illustration of the single bullet theory, a crude drawing swiped in toto from a January 19 article in *New York Newsday*. Poor Governor Connally is squatting in a mysterious hole (or perhaps on the floor of the limousine), a sitting duck for the überbullet heading downward into his armpit. That's an odd configuration, especially in light of the facts: (1) the extensive photographic record of the motorcade shows that Connally's seat was at the same approximate height as Kennedy's; and (2) if, in fact, the bullet did enter Kennedy's back and exit his throat as Liebeler et al. claim, the bullet would have had an *upward* trajectory upon leaving Kennedy. The *Newsday*-cum-*Nation* drawing turns the preposterous single-bullet path into a straight downward line through the two men—a lot more palatable, even believable, but showing something that never was. This is a tactic we usually ascribe to CBS and *Time*, and we expect *The Nation* to correct the record. Not so this time out.

Instead, we get the Dan Rather school of journalism: It is because I say so. With what would be a good title for his memoirs, Cockburn shrugs off his factual errors in his original *JFK* column: "I thought it was true when I wrote it." In journalism, in history, in criticism and in publishing, it is not enough to "think" something is true. Nor should it be necessary for the readers to call Cockburn on his errors; that is *The Nation*'s job. It doesn't matter that Cockburn is a columnist with a considerable following and a penchant for provoking controversy. As a selling point, controversy helps, but please, don't misinform the public in the name of commerce.

The public is not stupid. As the polls show, a strong majority know the evidence does not support the fantasy that a lone nut shot and killed the President of the United States. Journalists (like Cockburn) and journals (like *The Nation*) should be our protection against official untruths. But in this unique instance, the media have bought wholesale the lies and distortions passed down from Washington. *The Nation* and Cockburn trivialize the event of November 22, 1963, by dismissing it as nothing more momentous than an accident. That will not do. As the record shows, Mr. Cockburn, J.F.K. did not trip on Caroline's doll. He was murdered—and history changed—by parties still unknown. *Oliver Stone*

LOOSE BAZOOKA

Odenton, Md.

I have followed the current American debate over President Kennedy's Vietnam with keen interest. *The Nation*'s chief contribution to this mushrooming controversy is the humorous pen of Alexander Cockburn. Because he knows little about this subject, however, Cockburn has distinguished himself by poking fun at serious scholars with witty feuilletonisms. While life would be boring if we could not laugh at ourselves, we must also recognize when it is time to stop joking around and get serious.

Several readers of *The Nation* have called on me to respond to Cockburn's attack on my book, *JFK and Vietnam*. They tell me Cockburn's otherwise good work has resulted in a certain following that will take his lead on this subject too. In other words, it would appear that we have in this case, to borrow an analogy from Victor Hugo, a loose cannon on the deck of the American left.

What is to be done? It is pointless to counter Cockburn with the ad hominem he inveighs against others. It is better to reason and gently persuade and raise the standard of debate to a more civilized and intellectually honest plane. It is in that spirit that I offer the following comments.

In my book, *JFK and Vietnam*, I discuss at length Kennedy's public comments that lend the impression he would not withdraw from Vietnam. I also deal with his private comments that lend the opposite impression. Since both sets of comments cannot be true, which set reflects Kennedy's genuine intent? Is there any hard evidence that can help us form a judgment about this? Indeed there is: the top-secret documentary record, especially Kennedy's withdrawal order itself and the records of those National Security Council (N.S.C.) meetings in which that decision was discussed and made.

There is no need (and certainly not the space) to repeat here the details of that record—*The Nation*'s readers have had plenty of that. The crucial question is this: When J.F.K. set the withdrawal in motion, did he think South Vietnam was winning or losing on the battlefield?

The preponderance of evidence strongly suggests that by 1963 Kennedy knew the war was a lost cause. My book documents how the lie about war progress was constructed, the actions of those who blew the whistle inside the government and the top-secret memorandums—beginning in early 1963, from the C.I.A., the State Department and Kennedy's own N.S.C. staff—that directly impugned this lie about progress.

Given the state of the battlefield, Kennedy feared his withdrawal plan would harm his chances for re-election. This helps us understand why he hid his true intent from the public *and* why, when he ordered the withdrawal to begin, he included a provision to keep it a secret. Do I advance this argument, as Cockburn charges, "with a willful credulity akin to religious mania"? Cockburn's followers would do well to read and make up their own minds as to whether my theses are based on reason or hysteria.

I wonder if Cockburn's followers notice the inherent weakness in his argument. For someone who claims that the system always produces bad Presidents, Cockburn cuts a strange figure by believing so trustingly in J.F.K.'s public pronouncements on the Vietnam War. Does Cockburn believe everything Presidents say publicly about war policy—or just what Kennedy said on Vietnam?

When Cockburn canonizes Kennedy's public comments on Vietnam, he keeps interesting company—from the far right. Like two peas in a pod, neither Cockburn nor Col. Harry Summers questions the integrity of Kennedy's promises on Vietnam—Summers because he thinks Kennedy was inherently good, and Cockburn because he thinks he was inherently bad.

Colonel Summers charges that my work on J.F.K.'s withdrawal plans has "vilified Kennedy beyond the wildest dreams of his worst enemies." Summers thinks J.F.K.'s Vietnam promises were good, and idolizes Kennedy as a great "macho warrior" who never would have tolerated the loss of Vietnam. Cockburn, still in step with Summers, says "one can easily argue" that J.F.K., had he lived, would have escalated harder and quicker than L.B.J.

There is nothing easy about reconciling the contradictory and tragic record of J.F.K. and Vietnam. American myth and self-image are involved. Because I cast Kennedy neither as

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EDITORIALS.

L.A. Lawless

For a moment, the whole world could glimpse the core of pain and the persistence of rage in the lives of black people in America. The Rodney King riot, which is still erupting as we go to press, is horribly perfect in its expression of the destructive elements of African-American experience: the stereotyping of an entire people, the powerlessness of even physically strong men, the prison culture of the ghetto, the cruelty of the law, the despair, discrimination and injustice. Once again shut out of the system, people in their fury took their grievances to the streets, the only place in this country where African-Americans have ever found redress, or the beginning of it.

In retrospect, no one should have been surprised that the jury let King's assaulters walk. From the testimony of the first of the twelve to speak up after the verdict, the panel was predisposed to believe the "thin blue line" theory put forth by the defense: The police are all that protects law-abiding citizens from the predations of a criminal class. Race never entered the jury's mind, the juror said, but then it didn't have to. Racial fears and prejudices are planted so firmly in their unconscious (not one of them was black) that nothing prejudicial need be said to produce the desired effect.

The whole setting of the trial encouraged a prejudiced ver-

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dict. The venue was moved from multicultural Los Angeles to the suburban Simi Valley in the far reaches of Ventura County, conveniently close to the Ronald Reagan Library in case anyone wanted to dash over during a break and see how racism was instituted in America on a truly grand scale. Nor was the figure of Willie Horton, perhaps the most potent racist metaphor in recent political history, entirely absent from the courtroom. In addition, the prosecutor, an African-American named Terry White, presented a good excuse for acquittal for jurors who believe somewhere in their souls that black men cannot be believed, especially when they are on the side of their brothers. And the silent specter of Rodney King himself, frightening to the jurors by his presence but invisible to them in his humanity, persuaded his peers in the box to believe the ideological arguments and video technicalities of the defense rather than the evidence of their own eyes. It was King, one more victim turned perpetrator, who was on trial, and he lost his case.

If he had won—that is, if the policemen had been found guilty—the masters of law and directors of government would have quickly patted each other on the back and declared that once again "the system worked." But of course the system does not work, despite the occasional conviction of those who abuse authority, kick people when they're down and malign races considered inferior to the dominant color. It malfunctions precisely in the way the King episode illustrates: There is a double standard of justice that extends from the lowest traffic court right up to the Supreme Court, from the police car on the prowl or the cop on the beat up to death row. Indeed, the system is getting more spiteful rather than more tolerant, as was supposed to happen in a society we hear is in constant democratic renewal.

The trials of Rodney King, beginning with his beating and ending, for the moment, with the riots in L.A. (King's civil suit is pending and a federal civil rights indictment is possible), were video events as well as legal ones. They were seen by hundreds of millions of people in countries most people in Simi Valley never heard of. Perhaps because the initial assault was in essence a TV show, it did not have absolute credibility to the jury; people have been trained to disbelieve what they see on television, to treat even news footage as docudrama or *cinéma vérité* as re-creation. Was that real, or Memorex? But the global audience has a different point of departure than the Simi jury, and the verdict in the world is likely to be guilty on all counts. No one can predict how long the sentence, which began in South Central Los Angeles, will last.

Globalopolies

Last year, the Bush Administration had the privilege of choosing the administrative Under Secretary General of the United Nations—apparently on the strength of a promise to Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali that this country would do something about the $555 million in dues it owes to the world body. Upon his appointment, Richard Thornburgh, the abrasive former Attorney General, secured the shutdown of the United Nations Center on Transnational Corporations [see Ian Williams, "Why the Right Loves the U.N.," April 13]. Having carried the deregulation of the U.S. economy to the limit of present political practicability, the White House has turned to making the world economy safe for its industrial sponsors.

The Center on Transnational Corporations was created by the U.N. Economic and Social Council (Ecosoc) in 1974, when OPEC had administered the first oil shock and the Group of 77 developing countries was demanding that the industrial world join it in creating a new international economic order.

The first assignment of the C.T.C. was to gather facts. Eventually it established that, as of 1985, the 350 largest transnational corporations, about half of them based in the United States, had combined sales of $2.7 trillion. That was one-third of the combined gross national product of the industrial market economies and was larger by several hundred billion than the combined G.N.P. of all the developing countries, including China.

These corporations are household names around the world: G.M. (then the largest), Exxon (second largest) and I.B.M.; British Petroleum, B.A.T. Industries and Imperial Chemicals; Elf Aquitaine, Peugeot and St. Gobain; Daimler-Benz, Siemens and Hoechst; N.E.C., Sony and Honda; Philips, Asea-Brown Boveri and Electrolux—the last three based in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden, respectively, economies too small to contain them.

The C.T.C. bookkeepers found that whatever their country of domicile each year these corporations were doing an increasing percentage of their business outside that country. Some were making more of their sales, even more of their product and most of their profit in other countries. Hence their designation as transnational corporations.

Recruiting management from their overseas subsidiaries and finding shareholders around the world, the transnationals have been losing, some deliberately shedding, their national identities. These increasingly stateless entities recognize the sovereignty of nation-states for reasons of their own choosing. They buy raw materials, locate plants, hire labor, make sales, charge costs, report profits, pay taxes and submit to jurisdiction in and among nations in accordance with the comparative advantage of each decision and the absolute advantage conveyed by their always mobile capital.

Competition among the transnationals in the world market turns on their relative control of market forces and their choice of global strategy. They may opt for profit in one market and for growth in the next one. They may choose as well not to compete but to divide the world market by implicit or explicit understanding.

In the "newly industrializing countries," celebrated as examples of growth by the market process, transnational corporations do a considerable percentage of the total industrial output—according to C.T.C. studies, 33 percent of Argentina's, 44 percent of Brazil's, 39 percent of Mexico's. On their own books, as internal transactions, they carry as much as one-quarter of all world trade.

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It was enough for transnational C.E.O.s to suffer such invasion of privacy. Matters began early, however, to go beyond fact-finding. Disquiet at the ascendant power of these corporations began to excite international efforts to write codes of conduct—for example, to restrain the promotion by Nestlé and its competitors of breast-milk substitutes in the shantytowns around the megacities of the developing countries—that might follow them across national boundaries. As long ago as 1977 an intergovernmental working group, convened by Ecosoc over the objections of the industrial countries, began negotiating a comprehensive code, with C.T.C. serving as think tank. A draft code was submitted in 1982 with disputed issues spelled out in bracketed alternative formulations, one alternative supplied by the Group of 77, the other by negotiators for the transnational corporations disguised as delegates of their country of domicile.

They were deadlocked until preparations for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development—the Earth Summit, to be held in Rio in June—brought another vote in Ecosoc. This time C.T.C. was ordered to prepare recommendations for the regulation of the transnationals, to be agreed upon and issued from the summit.

At that juncture, the Bush Administration appointed Thornburgh, who eliminated the C.T.C., effectively ending the threat of a code of conduct for the transnational corporations—and the embarrassment of a debate at the summit in Brazil about their arrogance of power. GERARD PIEL

Gerard Piel, founder of Scientific American, *is the author of* Only One World *(W.H. Freeman)*

The Big Chill

President Bush's ninety-day ban on new federal regulation was slated to end on April 28. But in a burst of deregulatory rhetoric, on April 29 Bush extended the freeze for four more months, insuring further delay and repeal of more health, safety, consumer and environmental rules. Despite repeated public promises from the Bush Administration that this regulatory freeze would not affect health and safety initiatives, the Administration has already endangered the public by gutting and delaying many crucial protective rules [see Triano and Watzman, "Immoral, Illegal and Deadly," March 23].

The moratorium has had a marked impact on the ability and the will of the federal agencies to do their jobs. The freeze has not only stopped agencies from implementing their programs through regulation during the past ninety days; it has created a climate of deregulatory fervor rivaling the Reagan years and has paved the way for the Office of Management and Budget and Vice President Quayle's Council on Competitiveness to tighten their stranglehold on the regulatory process.

By implementing the moratorium, the Bush Administration has relied on inaccurate explanations of its actions and has sought to conceal much deregulatory activity from the public. The Administration has been unable to explain to the public how the moratorium has been carried out by the agencies, or just what role the Quayle council—in charge of the freeze and accompanying review of the existing regulations—has played in its orchestration. Officials at government agencies have seemed at best confused about what has been happening, and none have been able to produce a list of the regulations that have been frozen.

When asked about specific programs delayed or meddled with by the Quayle council in the past three months, officials have denied that such actions have been the result of the freeze. Bush, it seems, is trying to have it both ways, claiming that the moratorium is working wonders while denying that it has had any effect on specific consumer or environmental rules.

Quayle, meanwhile, has relied on specious pseudo-economics to claim benefits from the rule freeze. At an early April press briefing, he claimed that the moratorium would save $10 billion to $20 billion. Once again, though, the Administration has refused to provide any documentation to support these statistics. Public Citizen and OMB Watch are still waiting for a response to an April 9 Freedom of Information Act request for background materials on Quayle's estimated "savings." Regardless of its source, no claim of savings from the moratorium should be counted until the costs to public health and safety and to the environment are also factored in—a consideration, it's probably safe to assume, that has been overlooked by Quayle's economists.

CHRISTINE TRIANO AND NANCY WATZMAN

Christine Triano is program associate at OMB Watch. Nancy Watzman is a policy analyst at Public Citizen's Congress Watch.

★

PEROT BEGINS

Your flow, Perot, of cash—your dough—
Is surely part of your appeal.
Your campaign pro will crow, Perot:
"At least this guy's too rich to steal."

A can-do Joe, gung-ho, Perot,
You find the White House worth pursuing.
But whoa, Perot. You need to show
What you can do is what needs doing.

So nu, Perrue? We're asking you
Your plans, your thoughts, your hopes, your fears.
There's not a clue. What would *you do?*
So speak. We are (like you) all ears.

Calvin Trillin

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

April Shakes

Petrolia

Cats and dogs sense an earthquake's imminence, or so they say. Euclid, orange tomcat, veteran of at least two major quakes, snoozed through that golden Saturday morning on my garden step, his mind on mice and the dying squeak of captured vole or bird. The wind rustled lightly through the cottonwoods and willows alongside the Mattole, not sixty yards from Euclid's peaceful nose.

Across the river from my house, hanging over the road to Honeydew in far northern California, six hours drive from San Francisco, is a cliff face some 300 feet high—a constantly changing testament to the subterranean upheavals that make this region the most seismically active on the North American continent. In the quiet of night I lie in bed and often hear the rattle of stones tumbling down this cliff as, far below, the North American tectonic plate strains against the Gorda plate to its north and the Pacific plate to its west. The region is Elysium to geologists. This summer will see 2,000 Friends of the Pleistocene swarming over the Coast Range, chipping away with their hammers.

Back at the start of March there'd been a shake. I was up in Oregon at the time and got back to find that the tremor had shoved the sewage pipes up a few inches and thrown the water out of the toilets, a well-known portent of Satan's arrival if you believe the infernal guidebooks. I reckoned then that the earthquake account for 1992 had, so to speak, been settled and that Petrolia was in the clear for a year or so. It rained for a few days after that shake. Dirt and trees slipped down the cliff face, and all day long our remote valley echoed with the crunch and grind of bulldozers and their cautionary whistles as they backed up to take another bite out of the shale at the foot of the cliff. I began to take daily photographs to see, at the end of the month, how much had moved without one noticing. Time's footfall can be so stealthy: a tree, already sprawled at an angle on the cliff face, dropping a couple of feet; a tail of scree starting higher on the hill. A few years ago some artists began rephotographing the Western vistas taken by Jackson and other pioneers who had lugged their 8x10s over the mountain ranges a century earlier. The artists worked out a complicated formula to get their own cameras and tripods in exactly the same positions as the ones adopted by their predecessors. I used to gaze at the old and the new vistas side by side. Often they seemed exactly the same until, somewhere in the new frame, I would realize that a rock had rolled a few feet or yards, a tree was missing, a scarp subtly altered in contour, and there was the sense of some immensely leisured, tranquil calibration of infinity.

Everything Turns Away Quite Leisurely

No stone rolled down the cliff that Saturday morning, and I left Euclid snoozing on the old redwood step, about 10:50 A.M., and headed off over the bridge to Lighthouse Road, which runs along for two or three miles south of the river, through to the mouth of the Mattole and the northern tip of the King Range. I stopped off at Jim Groeling's place—a fine barn he'd fixed up—to discuss some architectural drawings with him. We looked at his stone fireplace, cracked horizontally about six feet off the ground from the March quake, and moved over to a drafting table.

The first spasm seemed like a pistol crack but was perhaps a board or beam snapping, or just the urgent creak of wood under extreme pressure. There was a pause, and I saw Jim looking at his fireplace. Then it came again, and the barn shook like a dicebox.

One, two, three, four seconds. It didn't stop. We jumped for the door. It stuck for a moment and then we were outside. "Shit," said Jim, "I only just took out earthquake insurance." There's a limbo period before the policy cranks in. We took a step back toward the house and the ground shook again, strongly. Later a radio interviewer from KQED asked me if I'd been frightened and I said, truthfully, no, adding that maybe I was just too slow and stupid. I've been in hurricanes on the Florida Keys and there's plenty of time to flirt around with fear. The radio keeps telling you that the eye of the hurricane is here or there, getting nearer anyway, and you try to figure whether to leave the windows open a crack or tape them, and you remember that the highest point of Key West is only sixteen feet above sea level and how the great hurricane of 1936 caught a train halfway up the keys filled with refugees from Key West, drowned them all, and you can get nervous. The earthquake is nowhere, everywhere, gone. Later people spend hours reconstructing that brutal transition from the nowhere to the everywhere, when nature can destroy you.

Jim and I walked back through his house. The windows were sound, the fireplace worse. His shop was a mess. But nothing of what we could see in the landscape around us spoke of serious damage. It was like Bruegel's painting of the fall of Icarus, about which Auden wrote his great poem about suffering and the Old Masters. Only we couldn't perceive that bit of the tranquil panorama in which Bruegel had shown Icarus drowning. We couldn't sense that a few hundred feet above us up the ridge, David Simpson and Jane Lapiner's house had shaken apart, that rocks had thundered down the cliff face opposite my house, that a mile to the north at the precise moment that I was spreading out the blueprints on the hood of my car to continue our conversation, an overturned coffee machine in the Petrolia store had already started a blaze that would finish off the store and the adjoining post office in about forty-five minutes.

Gabby Cohen came bowling down Jim's driveway in a truck. A boiler had fallen over; they couldn't close off the water. Did I think that maybe under my house the gas line from the propane tank had fractured, that gas was accumulating, that the pilot light was on? I thought of no such possibility. Driving to the bridge, back toward my house, I saw a black plume of smoke. This was the first time I felt a stab of personal anxiety. Was it my place? The road twisted and turned; I got my bearings and realized it was farther north, probably in the town itself.

It concentrates the mind when you find yourself approaching a final few yards round a bend, up a driveway, not know-

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

ing whether your house is up or down. Mine was up. The windows were whole. The redwood garden step was empty. I remembered my father describing to me what happened after a German V2 rocket had hit our house in St. John's Wood in London during the Second World War. My mother and I were evacuees in Cumberland, a few hundred miles north. My father was out. The cat was in sole occupancy. The rocket destroyed the house and blew the cat's fur off. Returning home from work, my father met the poor creature, who fled at his approach. Who to blame for the explosion? In the cat's mind there was only one candidate. As the Gnostics feared, God had turned out to be on the wrong side.

Bomb blast does famously strange things. My mother used to lament the heavy marble table blown to powder by the V2. Yet till the day she died she put the tea tray down on a lighter table that had survived next to the heavy one that hadn't. The quake had been similarly sportive. I have seventy-five-pound lead weights on my stereo speakers. They had been tossed four feet away. A glass pitcher on a wooden divider had moved five inches. Nature had been absent-mindedly destructive, sparing a glass bowl, breaking a clay pot from New Mexico, kicking over a hurricane lamp, above all leaving the house up on its blocks which, a year before, Bob Shephard had supplemented with bell-shaped concrete piers sunk in the earth, strengthened with rebar and crowned with metal ties holding the house down. In 1989, living in a motel between Santa Cruz and Watsonville only a few miles from the epicenter of the Loma Prieta earthquake, I had walked with Frank Bardacke in its aftermath down the streets of Watsonville and counted scores of old Maybeck houses tossed off their piers, broken-backed, red-tagged, finished. The Loma Prieta quake had a force of 7.1. This new one, it turned out, was rated at 6.9. Memories of that earlier quake lay on the floor as I walked through the house: porcelain survivors of 1989 done in by 1992, along with two cups I had bought in Cork on the eve of my mother's death and of Loma Prieta, smashed in a final appointment in Samarra. Every now and again the house would shudder in an aftershock.

I drove into town. At the bottom of the black plume was the Petrolia store, now almost gone, with picture-book red flames licking its remains against the backdrop of the coastal hills and a foreground frame of eucalyptus. The firehouse, a few yards to the right, was intact, its crew away at a firefighting clinic in Guerneville, a couple of volunteers squirting water in the direction of the store. Later the person from KQED asked me to "describe the town of Petrolia." I said there were a few houses, a school, a church, a community center and the store. The focal point was the store, now volatilized by Fahrenheit 451 on upward. No gas, no milk, no friendly chats with Cynthia, Renée, Trish.

Renée walked by, pale and shaken. A woman in a Camaro pulled up. She'd been driving over the Wildcat, the route from Ferndale forty miles north over the mountains, and the quake had blown her off the road. There were rock slides everywhere. I had to leave later that day and asked if the road was drivable. People do what they always do in disasters. Silent staring, action updates, hash and rehash of the moment when. Talk as stipend, comfort and anesthetic. I took some photographs of the dying store and the living firehouse beside it. Back at my house I finally remembered to turn off the gas.

The Splash, the Forsaken Cry, And the Sun Shone as It Had To

I drove along the north side of the Mattole, up toward Conklin Creek to see if Dan Weaver was O.K. I knew his wife, Tally Wren, was away in Garberville. The road was very bad and I had to get out of the '67 Chrysler 300 to clear the road of rocks. Nature, aside from the mess in the road, seemed only slightly askew. It would take a hard rain to reveal what toll had been taken in terms of weakened banks, loosened trees, masses of earth or stone kept back by only a root or snag. Dan, who had stood in the kitchen through the quake holding the doors of his glass cabinet shut, said the dogs had taken it badly but the horses had danced. On the hearth lay a big undamaged crucifix from Mexico amid the fragments of a glass candlestick. An hour later Tally came walking up the driveway. She'd been trying on a bra in Changes in Garberville and had run out in the street with her shirt open. The road back hadn't been a problem.

I cleaned up, talked to my neighbor Carlos Benemann, who also has a house in Ferndale. He described the mess over there, and how the Best of the West horse parade had ended ten minutes before the quake hit. A woman had fallen off her horse and broken her pelvis, the worst casualty. Then at 7 P.M. I set off on the drive to San Francisco. The earthquake finally registered on my nervous system. Fifteen miles south of Garberville my eyes began to close and I pulled over and slept for half an hour. I had to take two more roadside breaks and got into the city at 2 in the morning, taking off for Texas at dawn.

The next morning Tally called from my house. There'd been another quake at 4 A.M., a 6.5 shock. My place was O.K. David and Jane's house was definitely gone and they were in their new barn, cynosure of the Mattole, originally intended for horses below and dancers above. Emergency crews and supplies were flooding into Petrolia, but there weren't too many customers. Tally had told them there were plenty of homeless people in Eureka, an hour and a half to the north.

My plaster of Paris plaque of Robespierre had smashed in the 1989 quake, thrown from the wall of my sitting room in the Adobe Motel. I almost asked Tally to check whether the other plaque, of Saint-Just, was still safe in the garage, but let it go. She said there was no sign of Euclid.

The next evening I was facing an audience at the University of Houston, talking about the election. I described the grinding of the tectonic plates up in Humboldt County. When the pressure gets too great, you get a quake. The audience listened with interest. Petrolia had been on the news. I drew a parallel between the grinding plates and the grinding, unresolved pressures underlying this election year. Reduced to simile, nature was safely on its chain again.

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BELTWAY BANDITS.

DAVID CORN

■ Honorable Men

When Senator Warren Rudman announced that he was fed up and would not run for re-election, official Washington emitted a sigh and the pooh-bahs of punditry rushed to hail Rudman, a moderate Republican, and lament his pending departure. Lost in all the handwringing was the fact that Rudman, now the decrier of the system, had done his share to cover for bad government. As vice chairman of the Iran/*contra* committee, he successfully thwarted a full-fledged investigation into the misdeeds of the Reagan Administration. During last year's confirmation hearings on Robert Gates's nomination to be C.I.A. chief, Rudman, pimping for the Bush Administration, defended Gates's self-proclaimed and curious ignorance about Iran/*contra* matters by saying that Gates was guilty only of nonfeasance, not malfeasance. (So much for standards for public servants.)

Rudman engineered an ugly scene in which the Republican side publicly excoriated Thomas Polgar, a former C.I.A. officer and staff member of the Iran/*contra* committee who somewhat daringly testified against Gates. Polgar's son, by the way, works for Rudman. The Senator was also an author of the eponymous Gramm-Rudman legislation, which called for arbitrary budget cuts that would allow lawmakers to avoid doing what they are paid to do: make the hard choices.

When you hear the media bleating about the honorable Rudman, think too of Senator Alfonse D'Amato. Last summer Rudman, as vice chairman of the Ethics Committee, helped whitewash the investigation of his fellow Republican, who had been accused of engaging in all sorts of influence peddling. Although nearly half of the fifty-six witnesses from whom the committee took depositions invoked the Fifth, Rudman felt no compunction about declaring the inquiry thorough and final and pronouncing D'Amato fit to serve. Rudman can rail against Congress all he likes, but when he had a chance to clean up 1 percent of the Senate, he played politics, just like everyone else.

For those of you keeping score at home, since Rudman's Ethics Committee issued its flimsy report essentially clearing D'Amato, the Bush Justice Department—not known for waging vendettas against Republicans—has indicted D'Amato's brother, who was the Senator's 1986 campaign manager; his chief fundraiser for Puerto Rico; and, just last month, his campaign treasurer. Each man is accused of some wrongdoing made possible by his association with the Senator. And the Ethics Committee, according to *Roll Call*, has forwarded to the Justice Department the testimony of several people it interviewed during the D'Amato probe—including a former D'Amato aide—so that the material could be reviewed for perjury. True, the Senator remains indictment-free, but with D'Amato there may be so much smoke, you can't see the fire.

■ House of Games

Washington breeds parasites—people and businesses that suck money and life out of the political process. For some lobbyists and trade associations, the recession has lowered the level of feed in the trough, but old habits die hard. Take the National Association of Home Builders, which represents developers, construction companies and the like. Tough times have eroded the Washington-based nonprofit association's rolls, and it asked its members to approve an increase in dues. After an acrimonious debate during which the association claimed that it had sliced all the fat, the members grudgingly went along. Still, the penny pinchers hired Bill Cosby to entertain at their annual convention in Las Vegas in January—for a reported $160,000. Members paid to see the Coz, and proceeds went to the group's political action committee, BuildPac.

Shortly after that, in February, the association's senior staff, showing how they were laboring to keep down costs, trundled off to the Grand Cayman Islands for a "planning retreat." The schedule was grueling. A reception was held the first night, followed by a party. The next morning was devoted to a session on "how to work best with others of the same or different" work style. Then all afternoon there was free time. In the evening exhausted staff members could unwind at a "welcome reception." Day Two opened with a seminar on "what skills are needed to be a team player." In the early afternoon the overworked staff trudged off for a boat tour and snorkeling and, after all that, had to cope with more free time for the rest of the day. Day Three brought a needed change: free time in the morning. A three-and-a-half-hour afternoon program covered "high-performance organizations," which included a discussion of what had been learned the previous two days. Then came a treasure hunt, a buffet dinner and, yes, more free time. Some association members are peeved that their dues are underwriting such frivolity. But most of them probably write off the fees on their taxes, so, again, you-know-who subsidizes the tab.

■ Sorry About That, Chief

Only after bursts of outside pressure and ridicule did the C.I.A. release the final report of its Task Force on Greater C.I.A. Openness, which—these guys just can't help themselves—was initially classified. The report blends needed proposals for increasing public information about the agency with P.R. moves. For example, it calls for declassifying more historical material, "especially regarding C.I.A. successes." It also recommends that the C.I.A. provide background briefings to corporate leaders, a move that Gates wisely did not approve. But the report skips past the Freedom of Information Act. The agency is notorious for its excruciatingly slow and seemingly capricious response to F.O.I.A. requests. It even stalls on releasing documents it has previously made public.

The task force report stunningly calls on the C.I.A. to "admit when we are wrong"—a recommendation Gates gracefully ignored in his response to the study. He probably saw this as a bonehead suggestion and a dangerous precedent for a government agency. Who in this town admits they are wrong? In contradiction to its mission, the task force also urged Gates to "preserve the mystique" of the agency. To what end, its members—most of whose names remain classified—did not disclose.

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WATCHING RIGHTS.

ARYEH NEIER

In suspending the Peruvian Constitution, shutting down Congress and the courts, imprisoning political opponents and announcing rule by decree, President Alberto Fujimori pledged to eliminate the Sendero Luminoso guerrilla threat by 1995. Could he succeed? Perhaps. Here's how.

Although the courts in Peru have been as corrupt as Fujimori claims and largely irrelevant to the guerrilla war, the Congress is another matter. Some of its members have been outspoken critics of military abuses, and along with segments of the Peruvian press and the country's human rights organizations, they are responsible for whatever small restraints the armed forces have felt up until now. By attempting to silence his domestic critics, Fujimori is giving the military the free hand it has long sought. Peruvian troops may now round up all those suspected of having a connection to Sendero, torture them and then round up all those whom the victims name to torture them for additional names. Similarly, the armed forces will no longer have to worry about denunciations in the Congress when they massacre whole villages in which Sendero is thought to have established itself. This counterinsurgency strategy can work because it persuades peasants that the only way to save themselves and their families is to identify the suspected Senderistas among them to the soldiers or to drive those suspects out of the village. In Guatemala the military defeated the guerrillas by such means in 1982 and 1983.

Of course, the Guatemalan military also eliminated some 400 villages in the process and killed tens of thousands. In Peru the slaughter would have to be far greater. The country has nearly three times the population of Guatemala, and in the twelve years that Sendero Luminoso has been engaged in battle in Peru, it has penetrated at least twenty-one of the country's twenty-four departments, establishing itself solidly in the capital as well as in the provincial towns and rural areas. To fulfill Fujimori's pledge to wipe out Sendero Luminoso by 1995, it might be necessary to massacre whole neighborhoods in Lima for the terror to work sufficiently on the city's slum dwellers. The armed forces would have to kill hundreds of thousands. There could be no quarter. Utter ruthlessness would have to be the rule, since Sendero would seize on any sign of faltering will and come back stronger than ever.

Short of such a terror campaign, it is impossible to imagine how Fujimori could make good on his pledge. His armed forces cannot defeat Sendero in open battle; wars between such opponents are not fought this way. As for smaller-scale terror, that has been the military's strategy since Sendero started to fight in 1980. Over the years the Peruvian armed forces have killed many thousands of noncombatants and tortured many more. Yet the level of repression has only won recruits for Sendero.

The urgency of defeating Sendero is not in question. The Peruvian guerrillas have little or nothing in common with the rebel movements that developed in Guatemala, El Salvador and other Latin American countries. Like the Peruvian armed forces, Sendero depends on terror, and in recent years the guerrillas have exceeded the armed forces in the number of noncombatants they have murdered. Analogies to the Khmer Rouge are not overdrawn. If Sendero ever came to power, its record suggests that it would not hesitate to kill even more people than would die if it is to be defeated by the means now chosen by Fujimori.

In recent days Fujimori has imposed severe limits on habeas corpus and is expected to follow this with a decree establishing secret tribunals to try suspected Senderistas. To those who recall what happened in Guatemala a decade ago, both measures are familiar. For its part, Sendero has stepped up its attacks. A Congressman removed from office by Fujimori and his companion are among the latest victims.

Is there an alternative to either the triumph of Sendero or Guatemalan-style terror? One option—to maintain the policies of the past twelve years—was eliminated with Fujimori's coup. Fujimori's three democratically chosen predecessors as President abdicated much of their authority to the armed forces, but some restraint was exercised through the efforts of those whom Fujimori is now trying to silence. Even then, the cost was unacceptable. Terror was a central instrument of war, and Sendero steadily gained ground. Over the years 25,000 have been killed, hundreds of thousands have abandoned their villages, ever-larger numbers of Peruvians have been impoverished and virtually every sector of the economy, with the exception of the corrupting drug trade, has declined.

Another option—to fight a clean war—has yet to be tried. In such a war civilian authorities would make a serious attempt to discipline the armed forces, punishing those who commit human rights abuses. By so doing, the government would attempt to establish its legitimacy among the poor, who account for most of the victims of the conflict and whose allegiances will ultimately determine the war's outcome. Could this work? Probably not without a tremendous infusion of resources from outside to help alleviate economic misery. Firm policies against corruption would also be necessary. Still, it would be a monumental task, after all these years, to persuade poor Peruvians that the government and its armed forces have changed. And, of course, ending corruption and altering the behavior of the military are a lot easier said than done.

The situation in Peru is so dire that there is an air of unreality to the proposition that the government fight a clean war against both Sendero and corruption, and then also attend to the desperate plight of its impoverished and embittered masses. It is not difficult to understand why President Fujimori would think it simpler merely to unencumber the armed forces. What he may not have thought through, however, is the cost that will be exacted in Peruvian lives if his approach is to succeed.

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ARTICLES.

REFORM THE COURTS, POLICE

Bringing Justice To South Africa

DIANA R. GORDON AND HELET MERKLING

That South Africa survived its moment of truth does not simplify its hour of decision. Reformers taking stock after the lacerating referendum campaign know that while the victory for political change dealt a body blow to the white right, it may also have strengthened President F.W. de Klerk's effort to retain white power in a postapartheid government. Negotiations in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa), which resumes May 15, will still have to take account of white grievances and fears—of a weakening economy; of losing jobs and land to the black majority; of the *swart gevaar* (black danger), which has replaced communism as the demon of choice.

The spiral of violence contributes powerfully to the fears of whites. It also smeared the reform mandate of March 17 with blood, the blood of blacks in the townships. As Israel Skosana, an African business executive, recently said, "Many of us will not live to see the new South Africa." According to the independent South African Human Rights Commission, apartheid violence has taken almost 6,000 lives since Nelson Mandela was released from prison in February 1990, including 783 just between the announcement of the referendum on February 20 and April 24.

But angry township activists have become pawns as well as perpetrators of violence. The April 23 murder convictions of five policemen in the so-called Trust Feed massacre constitute the first official acknowledgment that blacks are being held hostage to apartheid by a "third force" of vigilantes and *agents provocateurs*, trained by the military and supported by the police. In that case the defendants, led by a station commander in league with an Inkatha leader's effort to wipe out local A.N.C. supporters, attacked mourners at a post-funeral vigil in a Natal township in 1988, killing eleven people. Police have also been charged with murder in another case, in which they shot at demonstrators in Sebokeng township, killing eighteen of them and wounding 300 others.

Commissions, courts and journalistic inquiries are piecing together circumstantial testimony incriminating the Department of Military Intelligence of the South African Defense Force (S.A.D.F.) and the Security Branch of the South African Police (S.A.P.) as command centers for a savage campaign to manipulate clashes among blacks, particularly between the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party. It is still too soon to draw the full picture. But investigative efforts currently under way have unmasked the repressive apparatus of the state as the ultimate enforcer of its ideology. They also remind us that political transition to formal democracy is necessary but not sufficient to alter the priorities or strategies of repression. In the short term, internal peace conducive to political negotiations depends on de Klerk's firm intervention in the violence. Further down the road, only self-conscious and thoroughgoing institutional reform can complete general political transformation.

South Africa must confront the question of how to insure normal civil authority.

Indications of police and military involvement in the township violence have been accumulating for more than a year. First came the 1990 Harms Commission of Inquiry recommendations that former army death squad members be prosecuted for assassinations and attempted murder. Next came de Klerk's admission in July 1991 that the S.A.P. had funded Inkatha rallies and projects. A number of efforts to purge the poison have stalled, however. No charges have been brought pursuant to the Harms Commission findings, and last December the S.A.P. acknowledged funding an Inkatha rally nine months after de Klerk said support had ended. Indifference to the violence and resistance to inquiries into it have come not only from securocrats but also from de Klerk himself, giving credence to the A.N.C. charge that the government has a double agenda of negotiating a democratic metamorphosis while simultaneously destabilizing and co-opting black groups in order to guarantee minority power for whites.

In the summer of 1991 de Klerk promised to take "relentless action" against those in the security forces who were fomenting violence, but three months later he announced that all allegations of anything beyond the culpability of renegade individuals were groundless. Chris Orr, senior researcher at the Independent Board of Inquiry into Informal Repression, which monitors assassinations and extralegal activities of the security forces, disputes de Klerk's assertion that "investigations in all these cases have been successful." He notes that the recently retired police general assigned by de Klerk to look into police violence, Ronnie van der Westhuizen (known in the South African human rights community as "General Fixit" because of his ability to suppress evidence against assassins of antiapartheid activists), recommended to the Attorney General of the Transvaal that he drop the investigation into the killing of Bheki Mlangeni. Mlangeni was a young human rights lawyer who was investigating claims by Capt. Dirk Coetzee, the first white police officer to confess participation in a police death squad. Mlangeni was killed in Feb-

Diana R. Gordon, who teaches at City College of New York and usually writes about U.S. crime policy, visited South Africa last year. Helet Merkling is a South African labor lawyer and program director of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights in New York.

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ruary 1991 by a parcel bomb mailed to Coetzee but delivered to Mlangeni. Several factors suggest police involvement in that crime. A forensic expert hired by Mlangeni's law partners has reported that someone tampered with the remains of the bomb while it was in police custody and that the police denied the expert's requests to interview them and examine evidence needed for his investigation. Furthermore, Mlangeni was killed by a device hidden in a Walkman and headphones, which would involve technology not likely to be available to unsophisticated killers.

By far the most important effort to uncover the sources of violence is by the Commission of Inquiry concerning the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation, appointed by de Klerk last October and led by Justice Richard Goldstone, a highly respected member of the Appellate Division, the highest South African court. Two current commission investigations implicate the security forces as agents of violence. Last October twenty-three people were murdered and forty-two wounded after the funeral of Sam Ntuli, an assassinated trade union and A.N.C. leader, in Thokoza, a black township near Johannesburg. Witnesses have charged that the police were responsible, saying that people who gunned down A.N.C. supporters at a bus stop and those who assassinated Inkatha supporters a couple of days later were driving the same car. The other investigation, begun in mid-January, is probing accusations by Mbongeni Khumalo, a disaffected member of the Central Committee of Inkatha and former chief of its Youth Brigade, that the S.A.D.F. established front organizations that provided Inkatha with political and military training for its contest with the A.N.C. While Goldstone has both credibility and authority, his mandate is limited to investigating incidents that have occurred since July 1991, his resources are meager and the commission, by its nature, cannot determine political accountability. Exposing individuals and groups behind the violence can, however, legitimize demands for reform. Goldstone is now reviewing evidence collected by *The Weekly Mail*, the feisty South African paper that broke the story last summer of government funding of Inkatha and of massive covert action by the security forces.

Whatever verdict is returned on the "third force," Codesa—as well as the interim and permanent governments that follow it—must confront the question of how to insure normal civil authority. Postapartheid justice must not only build new institutional structures and change the behavior of police and courts but must convince the majority of South Africans that law is not synonymous with repression. Reform is also necessary for international confidence in the new order. "Without free media, an independent judiciary, and legal machinery to protect people's rights, a great deal of development money could go to waste," says Anton Harber, editor of *The Weekly Mail*.

Converting the security forces of apartheid into democratic institutions that maintain domestic order will require a transformation of the South African Police from armed antagonists of the black majority into "helpers and protectors of the people"—an unexceptionable and likely future constitutional standard derived from the 1955 A.N.C. Freedom Charter. Although some recent police plans and statements by senior officials suggest that the S.A.P. would like to shed its political role, police culture in South Africa is very hierarchical and militaristic by European and American standards. Also, although senior white officers are generally loyal to the Nationalist government, many junior officers are more hard-line, actively supporting the racist Conservative Party.

Some police reform is under way. Minister of Law and Order Adriaan Vlok, implicated in Inkathagate, has been demoted; his successor, Hernus Kriel, has a reputation as a closet reformer. The new S.A.P. Strategic Plan aims at structural reform, improved service delivery and better community relations. And, according to Yolanda Kemp, vice consul with the South African Consulate in New York, the S.A.P. is waiving some standard tests to bring blacks into more senior positions. (While black South Africans make up 60 percent of the 110,000-person force, they tend to be assigned to patrol duty in the townships. There are only a handful of blacks in the higher ranks, and those are stuck in training assignments. They do not participate in management or policy-making.)

Police culture will change only when operations become less secret, a development that may be hastened by the recent repeal of the section of the Police Act that prohibits publication of any "untrue matter" about the police or police action. Also key is extensive retraining that makes a clean break with the paramilitary and security functions of the S.A.P. Nicholas Haysom, a lawyer and member of the A.N.C.'s Constitutional Committee, suggests that changing institutional mechanisms of control of the S.A.P. may affect how police use their discretionary powers. "The South African police are unique in their degree of centralization, their monopolization of the use of force, their paramilitary character," he notes. "The police job here is done as an internal military campaign rather than as crime control. I'd like to explore community control over policing." He embraces an idea popular among South Afri-

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can activists: that there must be organizations with the task of forcing visibility and accountability on all the newly democratized instruments of formal social control, including civilian complaint review boards for police.

Courts, too, must be reformed. The South African legal system includes a rights-oriented jurisprudence, and there have been judges who used it to mitigate the repressive racial laws. But the elite white judiciary—recently adorned with one Indian judge, Ismail Mahomed, by all accounts a brilliant lawyer and currently co-chairman of Codesa—has consistently enforced the apartheid regime. Public speculation about who will become the first black judges coincides with concern that there are not enough blacks with the requisite training and experience to put more than a handful into judgeships. The common perception that the judiciary is an instrument of oppression hampers reform, too. Two years ago David McQuoid-Mason, dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Natal, wrote, "At present it would be politically unacceptable to a majority of black South Africans for a black person to accept appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court."

At the heart of the legal system's legitimacy crisis has been South African judges' broad interpretation of the authority granted under the security laws to detain people without trial—a legacy that is likely to impede the perception, if not the reality, that South African judges can fairly administer a Bill of Rights and a new criminal code. The judiciary is also tainted by its past tendency to inflict humiliating penalties like whipping for minor offenses; by occasional lenient sentences for brutal crimes committed by whites against blacks; and by its use of the death penalty, often imposed for politically motivated killings. A 1989 Amnesty International report found that 1,593 people had been hanged between 1978 and 1987 (and this doesn't include the homelands), the highest execution rate—along with Nigeria's—in Africa. While executions dropped sharply in 1989 and were suspended by de Klerk pending reforms in capital sentencing, the moratorium has now been lifted, and 278 people were on death row at the end of April.

The mandate for negotiation that de Klerk received on March 17 will not end the violence or restrain the security forces. As a recent A.N.C. statement noted, "It is no coincidence that this violence rages as the Codesa working groups meet. It has been the pattern all along that as negotiations or peace efforts bear fruit, the violence again ferociously erupts." And dismantling the regime carries with it sources of conflict that will put new demands on police and courts, such as the tinderbox of land reform and the issue of compensation or reparation for the 3.5 million people who have been driven from their land in the past forty years.

Placing courts and police under new management, as it were, will not in itself assure that these problems are handled in the best traditions of nonracial democracies. Even if police and courts can stem their crises of legitimacy, group rivalries, with rebels of right and left, will continue; and controlling them will undoubtedly provide temptation for further brutality and insensitivity. The legacy of official and informal violence and repression has created rebellions with a life of their own—for example, among the many young urban Africans who see violence as an acceptable means of expressing political demand.

No one underestimates the challenges of peacefully transferring political power to a democratic polity in South Africa. But it is surely no more daunting than institutionalizing reform of the security forces and the judicial system. And if South Africa is to shed its authoritarian past, these tasks must be undertaken in tandem. □

POSTINDUSTRIAL CITY

Detroit Waits for The Millennium

CAMILO JOSÉ VERGARA

The city is quiet, the air clean; large open fields and derelict factories everywhere. The Detroit River is wide and calm, its surface turquoise green. Tugboats and cargo ships cruise slowly by. "We got the water; we may not have the gold, but we have the water," says Michael Goodin of Crain's Detroit Business. *"There is no other city in the area that can boast of an international waterway, a freshwater supply like ours."*

Detroit is a city whose economic power disappeared quickly, leaving it isolated, fragmented and nearly bankrupt. During the decade beginning in 1968, the year after "the riot," the city lost 208,000 jobs, one-third of its total employment. By 1990 about a million people lived in the city, about half the 1950 population, and of those nearly one-quarter were on welfare. At the same time, well over 10 percent of the city's 140 square miles of land was vacant.

Once the largest factory town in the world, a mixed ethnic blue-collar city, Detroit is now an African-American metropolis that can no longer sustain itself. More than three-quarters of the residents are black, with roots in the Southern states, particularly Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas and Mississippi. Compared with other large American municipalities, its population is homogeneous and dwindling.

"People are running; there is nothing to do here, there is no jobs here. People have to get some money somewhere," says Al, a retired carpenter. Residents have been leaving Detroit at the rate of about 20,000 a year since 1950. Those who remain insistently warned me against "dumping on us and our city," and against looking at Detroit in isolation. "You cannot write about Detroit as if it is in its own little niche, its own little corner, just because it's black," Goodin emphasized.

Detroit confronts the visitor and resident alike with ubiquitous decay. The downtown contains the most awesome concentration of emerging ruins in the nation: prematurely aging skyscrapers stripped by their owners and abandoned to na-

Camilo José Vergara, who has been documenting poor minority communities for a decade and a half, is completing a book on the new American ghetto.

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ture. Seen from the north, beyond the wide gap of the Fisher Freeway, a cluster of mostly empty Art Deco office buildings rises hundreds of feet above cleared lots. In its shadow, low buildings draw the homeless, alcoholics, drug addicts and others to institutions set up to help them. Large numbers of people congregate in only a few places: near the Detroit River, on a narrow strip about two blocks wide; and in Greektown, an enclave of ethnic restaurants and shops.

The numerous churches that stand alone in open fields, their neighborhoods gone, are still imposing and attractive. Green historical markers commemorate the past in official prose on buildings that are themselves ghosts. Vehicles speed past the vanishing neighborhoods of single-family houses. Detroit's famous freeways—five of them, more than in any city of similar population—seem to be waiting for the city to wake up and form traffic jams once more. Unlike New York City, where the poorest parts of town have been marked by ever-greater concentrations of destitute people and facilities [see Vergara, "New York's New Ghettos," June 17, 1991], Detroit is becoming increasingly barren.

After World War II, the construction of those five highways, ramming through hundreds of blocks of houses, sometimes at stretches of nearly ten miles, destroyed more than 20,000 homes, contributing to the decline of the city by providing easy access to the suburbs. Already two decades ago, according to the city assessor, Detroit had over 5,000 vacant commercial buildings, "which, if lined up, would occupy 60 of the city's 175 miles of business thoroughfares." The degree of shrinkage is unprecedented. Three years ago, a block-by-block survey by *The Free Press* found more than 15,000 derelict buildings. Asked to explain, Mayor Coleman Young replied that no city in the Western world had endured so much white and middle-class flight: "One million folks have abandoned this city in less than forty years."

Abandonment in a city that had such a strong belief in progress and growth has meanings that everybody understands. According to *The Free Press*, "The vacant buildings are the most visible evidence of the city's social and economic problems. The ugly confines of an abandoned house give shape and substance to every nebulous complaint about Detroit."

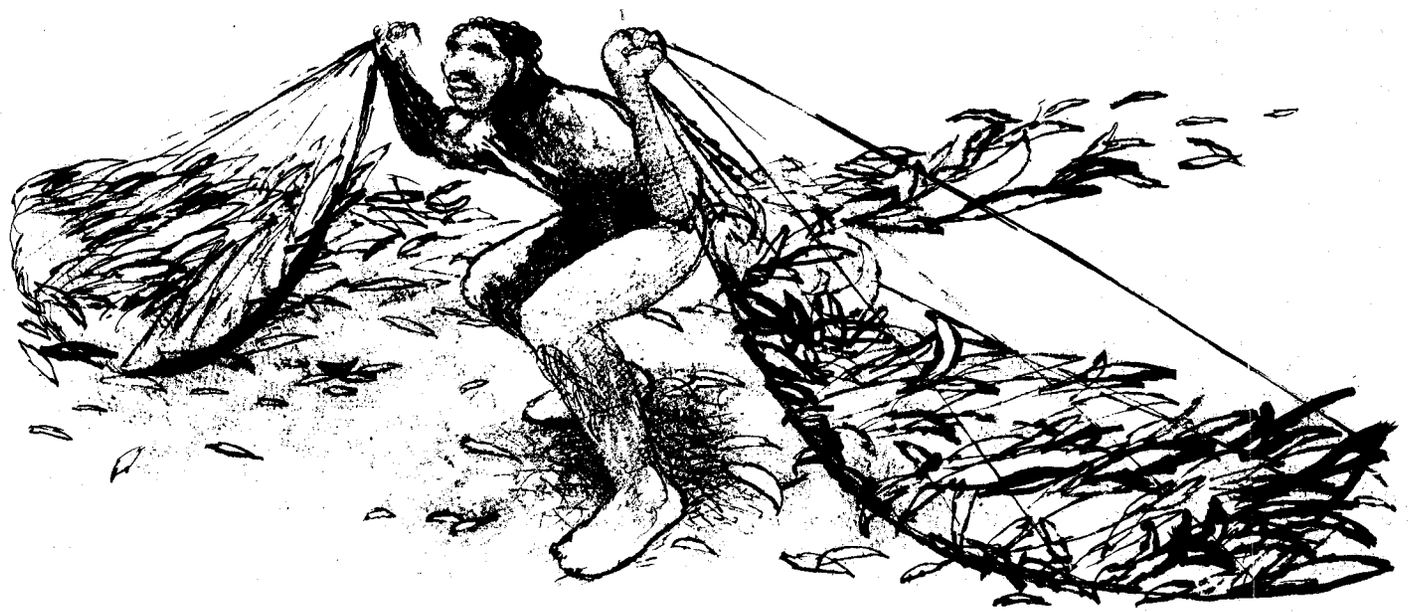
Ruins are typically regarded as depressing, showing both the seriousness of the community's problems and the fact that something better once existed. City residents tend to see them as symbols of white abandonment, while their suburban neighbors regard them as proof of the present leadership's inability to manage cities. For others, ruins symbolize cities hopelessly bypassed by the world economy.

The value of our devastated landscapes is thus limited to exhibits useful for focusing attention on reasons for decay; on the plight of the residents; and on the need to begin rebuilding. Conversely, they become spectacles, demonstrating the futility of meeting the challenge to rebuild: Why try to save what cannot be saved?

America leads the world in urban ruins. Yet our very closeness to them prevents us from seeing them clearly, from meditating upon their significance, while a strong taboo—marked by rage, impotence and despair—keeps us from admiring their evocative power. These environments are rich in historical and philosophical reminders of the achievements of an earlier generation, the passing of time and the power of nature.

There have been many proposals to restore economic health to the city. The City Planning Department's 1985 Master Plan proposed that Detroit, while retaining industry, should compete with Chicago, New York and the Bay Area in international banking, tourism, robotics and other high-tech ventures, re-emerging as a cultural and information center linked with the rest of the world by fiber optics. This image of the city already fits the reality of its thriving and expanding, mostly white suburbs.

With a population of more than 3 million, these are among the richest in the nation. On a late summer afternoon the winding tree-lined streets of Bloomfield Hills are full of children playing. No fences separate the well-tended lawns or the large, comfortable houses. Only lawnmowers break the sound of play and conversation. Beyond the residential enclaves lie the research and development outfits, corporate headquarters, financial centers, shopping malls, developers' offices and



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architectural and engineering firms that sustain this pleasant way of life.

Like earlier dreams of renewal, the Master Plan proceeded from a faith that some well-considered investments would set Detroit on a path toward reclaiming its importance in American economic life. In another era, large downtown projects were the preferred heralds of "salvation." The most important of these grand designs is the Renaissance Center, a riverfront complex planned twenty years ago to "rejuvenate the city's image" and draw people from the entire metropolitan region. Boosters still call Detroit "Renaissance City."

The center was designed by Atlanta architect John Portman and sponsored by Henry Ford II with the support of the chief executives of the city's largest corporations. In 1972, Ford described the Renaissance Center, while it was still on the drawing board, as a "catalyst that may change the whole tone and lift the spirits of a city and a downtown area that sorely needs a boost." Portman echoed his patron, saying: "That is what architecture should do, it should lift people; it should make them feel good; it should make them want to be around and not to leave the area."

After so much talk of extinction, the city's endurance has become a source of pride.

Conceived when the 1967 race riots were still fresh in people's memories, the center stands like a fortress high above the streets, separated from the rest of downtown by a broad boulevard, East Jefferson. Five large glass towers, the tallest seventy-three stories high, with a hotel, offices, shopping and commercial facilities, were completed in 1977 at a cost of more than $350 million. Two more towers were added in the early 1980s. A local developer characterized the choice of the center's location and design as a strategy to attract tenants: "They were saying, 'Move on over to us; we are very safe, they can't attack us from the river side, they can't attack us from East Jefferson.' "

On a visit to the Renaissance Center a dozen years ago, I saw Tiffany's, FAO Schwarz and a shop being readied for Christian Dior. Today, these symbols of wealth and sophistication are not there or anywhere else in the city. The most prominent commercial tenant on the building's ground floor is Burger King. Overall, the complex has a 5 percent vacancy rate. By contrast, the vacancy rate among office buildings still operating downtown is 22 percent. Yet despite this abundance of space, one large commercial building was recently completed and another is nearly finished. Both are elegant postmodern structures, similar to those in Battery Park City in New York or the new buildings in Chicago's Loop. Several subsidized middle-income housing developments have also been built along the river.

Winding alongside the Renaissance Center and making a 2.9-mile circle around the downtown area is the People Mover, a Disney-type train connecting thirteen individually designed stations. This federally funded above-ground rail system had the potential to contribute to a cohesive downtown. Yet by the time it was completed, in 1987 at a cost of $210 million, a huge section of the downtown was already obsolete.

"I used it once; it don't go nowhere," said Frank, a maintenance man in a downtown office building. The original plan, vetoed by the state legislature, was to build a regional transportation system connecting Detroit to its suburbs along Woodward Avenue. The People Mover was a compromise, allowing the city to spend federal funds already allocated for a small, experimental downtown transit system.

The Renaissance Center, the People Mover, the renovated Fox Theater (an Art Deco landmark on Woodward Avenue where the Supremes, Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye often played), a neighboring theater turned dance hall—despite these attractions, the center of the city remains a desolate place. New construction, when sound existing buildings were in dire need of tenants, has resulted in the emptying of older structures more distant from the river, thus accelerating the demise of the north section of the downtown. And the developments have not increased the number of commuters coming to the center city each day—still about 100,000.

For two weeks I lived in the city's desolate northwest section, immediately west of Grand Circus Park, once a regular stop for big bands, jazz groups and the nightclub set. Now two of the best-known and largest hotels are empty, and a third was recently demolished. Of five big theaters, only two are operating, and not a single specialty shop remains.

Underfunded service organizations predominate. Landlords undertake frequent raids to lure tenants from neighboring buildings. Battles rage for the rent money of the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, Family Services and employment training programs.

The sinister Book Tower, the tallest building in the area, looks like something out of a science-fiction novel. With almost no tenants, its 350-foot height serves mainly to support communications equipment. A brilliant white dish antenna on its classical temple top seems like a gigantic, wide-open eye surveying the city. A forest of rusting metal poles rises from the roof.

On the streets, wanderers and madmen sit on the sidewalks or push shopping carts. Those buildings that are still open are often cleaned and tended by Serbian women who barely speak English. Late at night the People Mover, reduced to one brightly lit car, loops around completely empty, as if carrying a party of phantoms from station to station.

A quaint red trolley imported from Lisbon links this part of town to the Renaissance Center, its route ending at Washington Boulevard, once the most exclusive commercial street in Detroit. In the early eighties city planners decided to transform part of the boulevard into a "people's place," a $5 million beautification project. Half the street was given over to a raised rectangular mall, with plantings, benches and overhanging iron fountains pouring water into a crystalline stream running over a bed of stones.

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The Lisbon trolley and the Washington mall came too late. This is a downtown mothballed, a stage set hoping for a replay of the 1930s, a place to wait for the millennium amid the homeless, the Serbian women, the pigeons and bats.

Detroit has great gaps. As nature takes over, the landscape begins to resemble a wilderness interrupted by citadels, small groups of houses getting smaller, and the rusting remnants of old industries. "Detroit is reverting to a farm," says Corinne Gilb, former director of the Planning Department and a professor of urban history at Wayne State University in Detroit. City residents, she says, are fortunate to have an environment that some people travel far for and pay dearly to enjoy. This observation is not well received by Detroiters, who perceive derelict spaces as dirty and dangerous. "Nature" is what grows in places people leave behind: the grass that sprouts in the cement cracks along the sidewalk, the hardy weeds and trees that push their way through the polluted floor of a razed factory, the tall plants that cover rusted metal, mattresses, rugs, bottles and tires in empty lots.

A popular saying in the city goes, "The last one out, turn off the lights." After so much talk of extinction, the city's endurance has become a source of pride. "I am not leaving; I am a Detroiter," says Al. "Why not stay and make it better?" Father Charles Denys, a Belgian priest whose parish, Our Lady of Sorrows, is in the poorest section of the city, adds, "We are just holding on. You have a lot of good people left." The adaptations needed to survive, though, are drastic. The Stapleton Center, a senior citizens complex occupying an entire block, is enclosed by a tall iron fence topped with a row of razor ribbon wire. "It is reality today," said Father Denys. "The complex was built at a better time; the fence came later."

A local teenager conceded that the complex looked like a jail for old people, but explained that these were measures designed "to keep people from going in, robbing them or something." Another teenager commented wistfully, "The churches take care of these old people. They got everything they need in there."

Middle-class blacks who can afford to move to the suburbs do so in the tens of thousands. But according to Elizabeth Brown, a community development expert, "a pool of leadership stays here, people who are the future." For Arthur Johnson, vice president for community relations at Wayne State, there is no place he would rather live. "I was not in it," he says of the robust and thriving Detroit of the 1950s, and notes that white people forget how segregated "thriving" Detroit was.

"Why do so many black families who can leave decide instead to stay?" asks Johnson. Comparing the city to a big mansion left for a poor family to keep, he views Detroit as both a prize and a burden: "They cannot heat it, they cannot provide air conditioning, they cannot paint it or keep up the grounds because they don't have the means to do so. As long as they stay they prevent the fixtures from being stolen, the pipes from freezing; they are the ones who keep the water running and put out the fires. If they manage to preserve it, it would be

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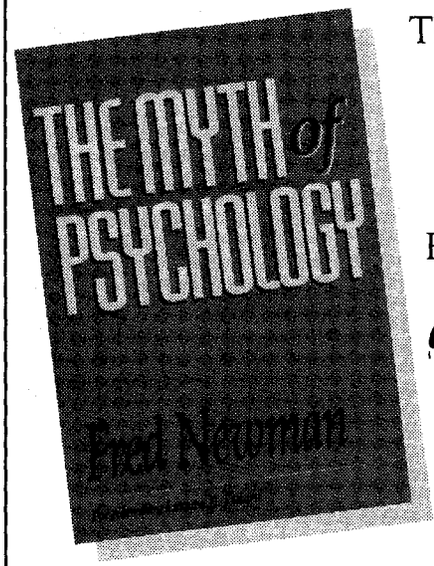

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for those who stay." But asked when the city is going to turn around, Elizabeth Brown replies, "If I answered that question, I may not like the answer and go somewhere else."

Motown is now spread throughout the world. Lacking a replacement for its automobile industry, Detroit must inevitably shrink. Only two assembly plants are still in the city from a total of about thirty in 1907. General Motors' Poletown and Chrysler's Jefferson North plants are automated, operating with less than half the labor force of the plants they replaced. Research and development and data processing have also moved out of the city. A widespread view is that this former "factory town" will eventually stabilize at a population of about 200,000, slightly more than in such Michigan cities as Grand Rapids and Lansing.

Coleman Young, in power since 1974, is jokingly referred to as "Mayor for life." But an election is coming up in a year and a half, and consensus has it that a change in political leadership will be good for the city, luring many of the developers and executives who haven't found Detroit a good place to do business.

Michael Goodin of *Crain's* expresses unqualified faith in the city, saying: "I don't think Detroit is a dying city. All the stuff of life is here. It is a city in transition. Right now crime seems like it is out of control. Of course, I know it is not, but it seems like it. It seems that there is desolation and unemployment everywhere. I know it is not, but it seems like it. It seems that there is nothing but poverty and decay; it just seems like it. I think Detroit is like a drunk who has to take all the blows before he will reach out and seek help and do what is necessary to get off the bottle and regain the strength.

"Whites living alone or whites who segregate themselves can prosper, and there is nothing in my mind that says that blacks living segregated cannot prosper among themselves. And if that is going to be the city's destiny, then that is how the city will begin to re-emerge and develop itself."

The powerful spell of this magnificent skeleton city by the river forces us to go beyond the issues of blame, anger and hopelessness; to ask questions about our national goals. I can think of no better place for meditation. Visits to Washington and New York City, our imperial capitals, should be followed by a visit to Detroit, a place for reflection.

Upon leaving Detroit, tired and bewildered, I saw a large male pheasant fly low in an arc over the freeway, landing on the grounds of a semiabandoned housing project. The energetic clapping of its wings, the rich browns of its plumage, its long tail passing so close to the dull cement of the highway—an unlikely phoenix. □

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The Karma

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

course, being Magyars the Hungarians then unpredictably refused to self-destruct and went on to live quite well (by Eastern European standards) under their tormentors, who had learned from the Budapest bloodshed how to step back smartly from the brink. The lessons of real, paroled life are so often at variance with our prison-forced dreams.

Now the dog is dead. The thing many of us lived for. Call it socialism or communism, defense of the Soviet motherland or any of its "progressive" variations. All gone, just like Scarlett O'Hara's Tara. Well, tomorrow *is* another day, except it has just arrived, now, this moment.

I suspect the sequel to *G.W.T.W.* fails to mention it, but surely Scarlett's first task, after the glorious fade-out, is to earn a living for herself. That is what the left has to do now. Not "rebuild socialism" or re-create the socialist project (whatever that is). But we have to survive, as individuals, in a disintegrating economy, each of us in different ways, without the solace, or any real hope, of healing our wounds by achieving a traditional utopia in our time.

I am a born utopian. I cannot live a day of my life without also imaginatively inhabiting another planet altogether, where men and women are reduced to children, orphans really, seeking the Golden City where all fatherless and motherless kids are given open asylum without question or demur. Inside the American left, as a Communist and later left-socialist and now who-knows-what, or within the European left, where I have worked hard to eliminate Stalinism (as an editorial board member of *L'Etincelle*) and Toryism in Britain (as a "founding father" of the *Universities and Left Review*), where I am a paid-up member of the Chalk Farm ward of the Camden Labor Party, I have always been part of a broad "people's movement" to kick state-or-bourgeois capitalism in the crotch. It's been wonderful. The left draws in some of the best and worst people. We often don't treat one another well; our eyes sometimes are so fixed on a distant egalitarian prize that we do not feel our brother's or our sister's pain, or cries unvoiced because the comrades won't listen. But life without leftism would have been a bore.

After a respectable breather, no doubt we'll soon be up and at 'em again. But this time around, dear heart, no bullshit. No blather or hyphenated, postmodern, Derridean-induced, M.L.A.-approved, Leninist-fathered, neo-Hegelian prison-house of abstractions ("the people," "progressive coalition," any word starting "multi-"), soupy generalities ("forces of

Clancy Sigal is a novelist and journalist formerly based in Britain. His latest book is The Secret Defector *(HarperCollins).*

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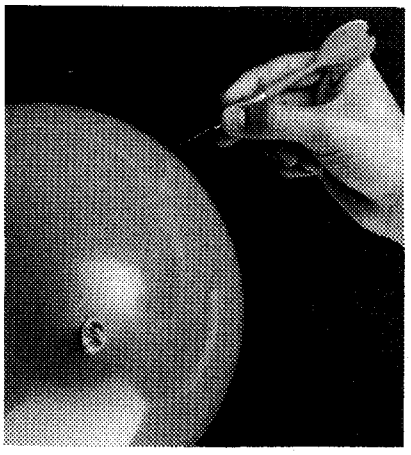

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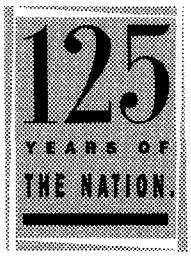

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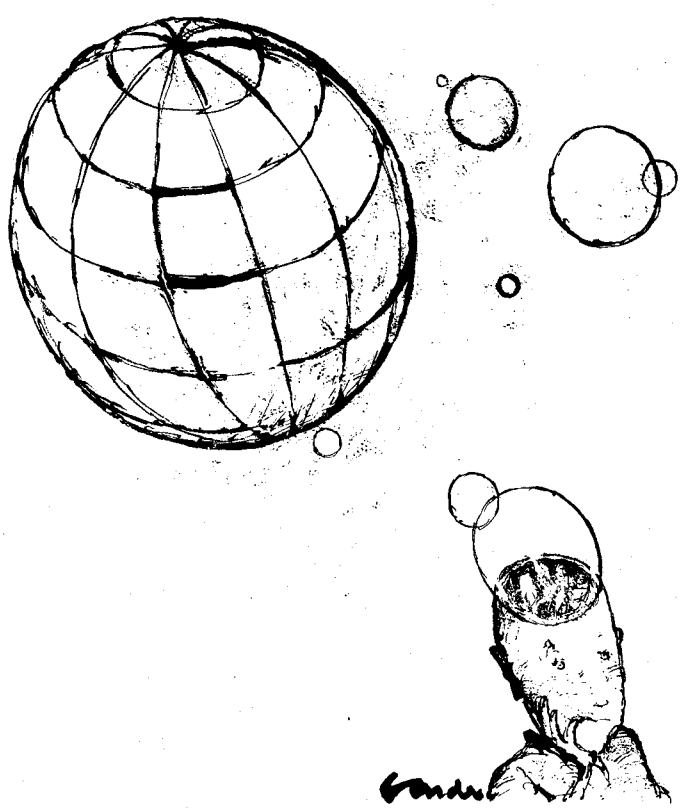
reaction," "gender-based") and waffle that feel like iron bars around my sense of reasonable syntax, and that always—I repeat always—end up in an authoritarian mess. We now know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the impulse to use left rhetoric comes from the same primeval fear of reality, and down deep a hopelessness about the possibilities of changing our condition, as that felt by the L.A.P.D. cops as they slugged the brains out of Rodney King. Since 1917 (and even before, if you read your Marx, including "young Marx") socialism has rested one hand uneasily on its unholstered gunhip.

Now is the time to think for ourselves, afresh, out of our own personal experience.

I too am a Marxist. Fat lot of good it does me. I cannot walk away from my past, the friends and comrades I have made, the mistakes I've committed, the hopes we shared. It is part of me the way that Freud is part of me—the way that (I fear) John Wayne's effeminate cowboy stride and Myrna Loy's laugh are part of me.

But I no longer have to spend my life in thrall to Hollywood-made images and the ideas they represent. Now is the time to stop already with the stale fantasies and Seconal rhetoric and think for ourselves, afresh, out of our own unique, unassailable (except by ourselves) personal experience, that which we know in our bones to be true about how daily life is won or lost by ourselves and our neighbors. Bad marriages, menstrual cramps, male hysteria, secrets of the heart locked so tightly inside our puritanical zeal—or the bad manners and surly-mouthedness that is its mirror image—that a real politics becomes impossible: That is what "community" is really about, not some glib label that a few able rhetoricians slap on an agenda for themselves and their fiery cousins.



Of course we mourn for the collective soul of socialism. But revolutionary grief, which is real, absurd and lastingly painful, locks us in a nostalgic dementia that can paralyze our language, tactics and abilities.

The hardest thing to do is think for ourselves. But we have models (not "role models," whatever that abomination is). Men and women who spoke, lived and wrote before the Deluge of Crap. (Incidentally, if you want to hear the latest version of Orwellian fist-speak, not from the left this time, try Bill Clinton's invocation of "the Amurrican people" or Jerry Brown's litany of "take back this country"—from whom, to what? Not for nothing did Clinton study how to twist and slaughter the Mother Tongue at Oxford.)

Americans once spoke eloquently, plainly, sparely. Try the text of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Or Sam Adams's exhortations to the Boston mob. Or Washington's Second Inaugural. Or Gene Debs's platform speeches, or Edmund Wilson's more cantankerous essays, or Randolph Bourne, or (to be unpatriotic) Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Today, I lean to the spiky women, Paglia and Ivins and Florence King (yes, *that* right-wing King). And for a real purgative to Bill C's never-inhale lying caterwauls, I do recommend a glance at how, not a word misplaced, Alexander Hamilton confessed in 1797 to screwing a fellow embezzler's wife. That's prose!

How do we regain a forgotten language? *The Nation* tries. Occasionally, it succeeds in publishing plain English written with force and point (see David Corn's "The Union and the Billionaire: Workers United, a Town Divided," February 17 and 24). But most of us are guilty, and there is a long way to go before we free ourselves of the whining, sentimental, self-serving, martyred, declamatory, Prussian-descended narrow rhetoric that is as much my radical reflex as yours. My mother and father, both labor organizers, were astonishingly free of this bilge—so there's no excuse for me. Maybe it was because they never went to college. Or because they had to learn to speak basic Yiddish, Russian, Croat, Polish, Italian and some Spanish before they could hope to earn the ears of their largely illiterate clients.

One part of me looks to the past for clarity, another warns that is how I got into trouble in the first place, by looking over my shoulder at the "authorities." I'm a big boy now. As they used to say on old-time news desks, it's time to go with what I've got. Meaning, each of us has an enormous, often despised, inner safety-deposit box of brilliantly lived experience, for which there simply was no room on all previous lefts. This experience—ordered, articulated, sealed at the joins by common sense and quiet decencies—is all we've really got. The door swings open with a huge and glorious clang. Let's go. □

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Word!

HILTON ALS

HIGH COTTON. *By Darryl Pinckney. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 309 pp. $21.*

For as long as I can remember, the historical field in which African-American literature—specifically the novel—has grown and prospered seemed a rather alien place to me. Poised on the edge of that field, in the gloves, shoes and scratchy tie of a privilege I hesitated to recognize, let alone own, I now know that this grew out of fear, a fear that began at home and was based on the misguided but not unrealistic notion that my ambition would cast me (as it was meant to) further from the class in which my parents did not prosper; that I would begin to manifest, as my voice, the "white" voice an aunt said I had already acquired when I rang her my first weekend away at university; that I would, in short, become the white boy a childhood friend said I'd turn out to be if I continued to express an interest in the world beyond our little dusty street in East New York.

Did not the above mean my *carte d'identité* as a black, an "outsider," could be revoked, thereby casting me adrift in more perilous terrain—a terrain I would not recognize, given how assiduously I clung to the mask of "acting" black as opposed to "being" so in an integrated head? On that mask, I had carved no eyes through which to see; nor was it in the least representative of my true identity, which I could not speak: I lived this blackness, like so much else, for someone else to speak. Often it seemed as though any racial identification I did have was due to my family's insistence that it be the largest part of myself. This insistence was *their* fear: They could not bear the manifestation of more signs of my difference. I was openly ambivalent sexually at university, mostly because it amused the white boys to consider how I defined my preference without declaring any desire. And yet these two "selves" did not produce a unified third. In my head, there was just the empty sound of a talking drum that did not speak my name, and also feared speaking anyone else's.

That empty sound drowned out everything else, everything, including the fact that the individual voice, as in "other" writing, existed in African-American literature, too. With the grotesque self-absorption of the fearful, I could barely register Wright or Morrison. Poised on the edge of that historical field, I regarded African-American literature as a monolith, as great and black and terrifying as my family. And, again like my family, I courted that monolith's disappointment. The discovery of "the specialness of my experience," as Baldwin wrote, was not possible. If I began to write, would it not be one more example of my whiteness?

Baldwin said difference 'can be made to connect me with other people.'

Sitting in my inability to produce language, I began to recognize, over there, under a large sky, in the swath where Zora Neale Hurston's heroines toiled to create (all-important word) home, my own mother, her chest sagging in cheap cotton, and the smell of my father, who was nowhere. And I recognized, too, some part of my self twisted by my father's rage, as Richard Wright's boy-self had been, in everything from *Native Son* to *Black Boy* to *Eight Men*. And were my sisters not more beautifully complex than Sula and Nell and other Toni Morrison heroines? What could I do with the information about my family's facts, real or imagined? These writers gave me myself, since they insisted on claiming me as a reader. And to be critical of their work was the first step in understanding my difference, my separation from them. In order to establish this difference in my own language, I had to face another of Baldwin's lessons: that difference "can be made to connect me with other people instead of dividing me from them."

I doubt any of the above would have occurred to me had I not at some crucial point in the late seventies begun reading Darryl Pinckney. For years before the appearance of his first novel, *High Cotton*, I read, over and over again, his essays, the majority of which appeared in *The New York Review of Books*. These essays were models of reasonableness on the "hot" subject of difference. Discussing, in the main, African-American writers prominent in the historical field (Jean Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, James Baldwin, Ishmael Reed), Pinckney addressed his collective subject with intelligence and grace. Here was a critic enthralled by words, intent on discovering the writer's meaning. Toomer, Hurston, Baldwin, Reed—they were writers first, Pinckney argued, whose blackness, politics and flesh and blood made history through their language. With his fine critical intelligence, Pinckney furrowed the historical field. Writing of everyone from Hughes to Baraka, he created a "geographic." What lessons as a writer of fiction would he be able to take from what he had charted?

In his elegiac essay on Baldwin written shortly after the writer's death, Pinckney connected me to the specialness of his reading of Baldwin's work by widening the parameters of my own: "I do not think I am alone when I say that for young blacks Baldwin's candor about self-hatred was both shocking and liberating. A message slid under the cell door. . . . If there was no acceptable version of himself as a black man, he would have to invent one."

Pinckney's *High Cotton* is a message slid under the cell door. In this case, the cell is blackness as defined by the family, replete with the burden of history and his own personal privilege.

"No one sat me down and told me I was a Negro," begins the nameless narrator in the aptly titled first chapter, "The New Negro." "There was nothing to be afraid of as long as we were polite and made good grades. After all, the future, back then, assembled as we were on the glossy edge of the New Frontier, belonged to us, the Also Chosen." The Also Chosen to whom the narrator refers are a family of college-educated blacks. And, as critic Michael Wood has pointed out, "also . . . hints at a special destiny of election and oppression, a second Jewry." This "election" is what Pinckney describes with mastery. He begins doing so where the brown page of ancestry curls, and on that page, embossed in gold, is Grandfather Eustace's name.

Grandfather Eustace—a graduate of

Hilton Als is a staff writer for The Village Voice.

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Harvard, clergyman, member of W.E.B. Du Bois's Talented Tenth (i.e., black elite)—represents the burden of race and class consciousness the narrator would like not so much to disavow as disaffect. The narrator prefers to observe rather than submit to feelings Grandfather Eustace's experience as the penultimate race man provokes. The narrator would like to be a New Negro (a phrase devised during the Harlem Renaissance by philosopher and Talented Tenth disciple Alain Locke) but a contemporary one, which is to say unlike Grandfather, whose taking of the high road through life, knowing he made the journey in a black body, culled "the chronic dread that maybe he wasn't good enough."

For what? To withstand "people who moved away from you at the movies, tried to short-change you at the new shopping mall" on one side of the wall and, on the other, those elderly relatives for whom one learned to hold one's "Vaselined head high." The image of the "correct" Negro who achieves "just like white boys" in the dead groves of academe, in his career—what can his image mean in a world that does not see him, a world that is implacable to the fact of his existence, cruel regardless of his caste? In a political world in flux, as the narrator's Indianapolis of the late fifties and early sixties is, when *High Cotton* begins, white people, seemingly, may even have power over the Lord (Grandfather's field; Grandfather's terrain). Could they stop His truth from marching on? Perhaps. Because "until His truth made it as far as restricted Broadripple Park, you did not go swimming." No baptism for the willing.

Of course, the narrator's continual questioning of Grandfather, his lore, his name, his image, as the children say, an attempt to deal with how the black man speaks, is a theme not particularly well-mined in Afro-American literature. (Perhaps the most notable example of it as a specific issue to be explored is playwright Suzan-Lori Parks's *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World.*)

In much of Afro-American literature, the patriarch is generally absent (Bigger's father in Wright's *Native Son*), a lout (Mister in *The Color Purple*) or a source of degradation and abuse (anything by Gayl Jones). The historical field rarely contained a presence that I recognized as being, potentially, myself. Not so for Pinckney, who looks to those elders less for validation than for background relief: He is fascinated by the sheen of questions such as, How does a son speak his father's name? Is it his own? Or something different? Baldwin has written around this subject, of course: "The [Negro man] has never . . . owned anything, not his wife, not his house, not his child, which could not, at an instant, be taken from him . . . by the power of white people. This is what paternalism means."

High Cotton's narrator does not even want to own himself: His existence can be viewed as a commodity; his future has already been bought. "The future was something my parents were either earning or keeping for my two sisters and me, like the token checks that came on birthdays from grandparents, great-uncles, great-aunts." Launched into *his* era of the New Negro, when his family moves to a white suburb in 1966, the narrator devises or believes he has devised a protective screen between himself, blackness and the burden of history. "No one knew who I was, and what I was I set aside every morning at 7:45." He may disavow race but not his privilege. He is constantly compiling lists of black Also Chosen achievement—"six guys in the House of Representatives, one man in the Cabinet"—an activity it would be impossible not to note, given the assumption he will

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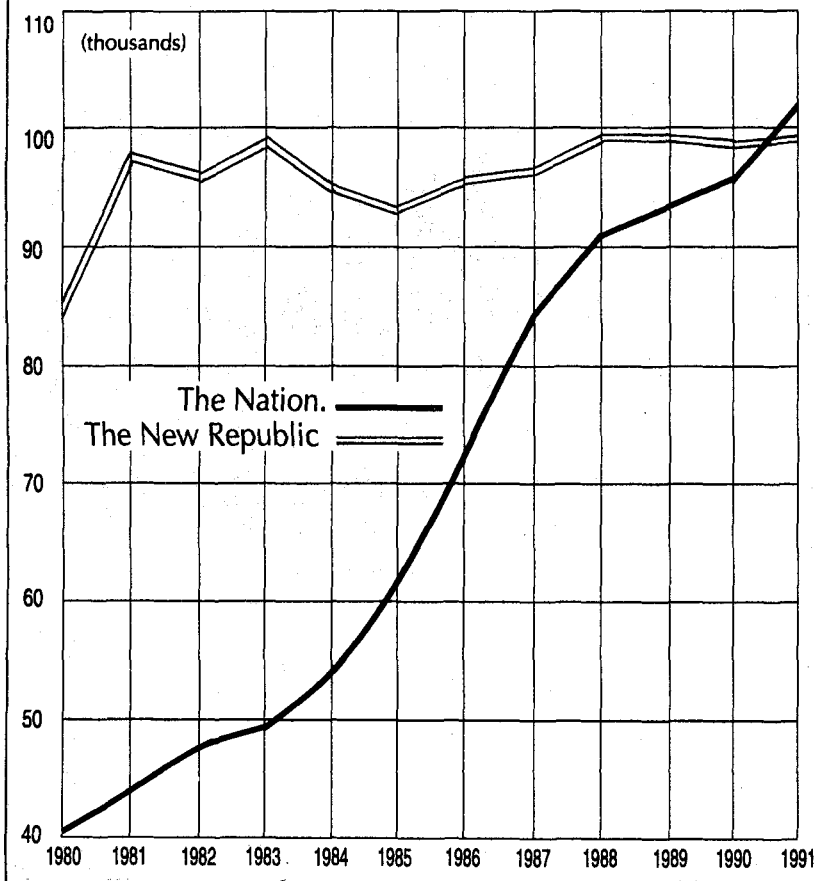

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achieve some kind of distinction, too. But as what? "Free and complex," he drifts to Columbia University, far away from the hissing of suburbia's summer lawns, to the eventual sense that, not unlike Grandfather Eustace, "I did not want people to have the usual idea about me." But these ideas of others about one—do they not in part comprise a self? And what of one's own sense of authenticity? "I wasn't real but everyone else was, a comfortable resignation of the self that was also useful as a sort of certificate of exemption. But one thing about the real world, if you aren't careful it will tell you what you are and just how low you stand." Pinckney makes his narrator's language drift, circularly, always back to the question of the self, against a backdrop of events that are sometimes sad, always lyrical, generally amusing.

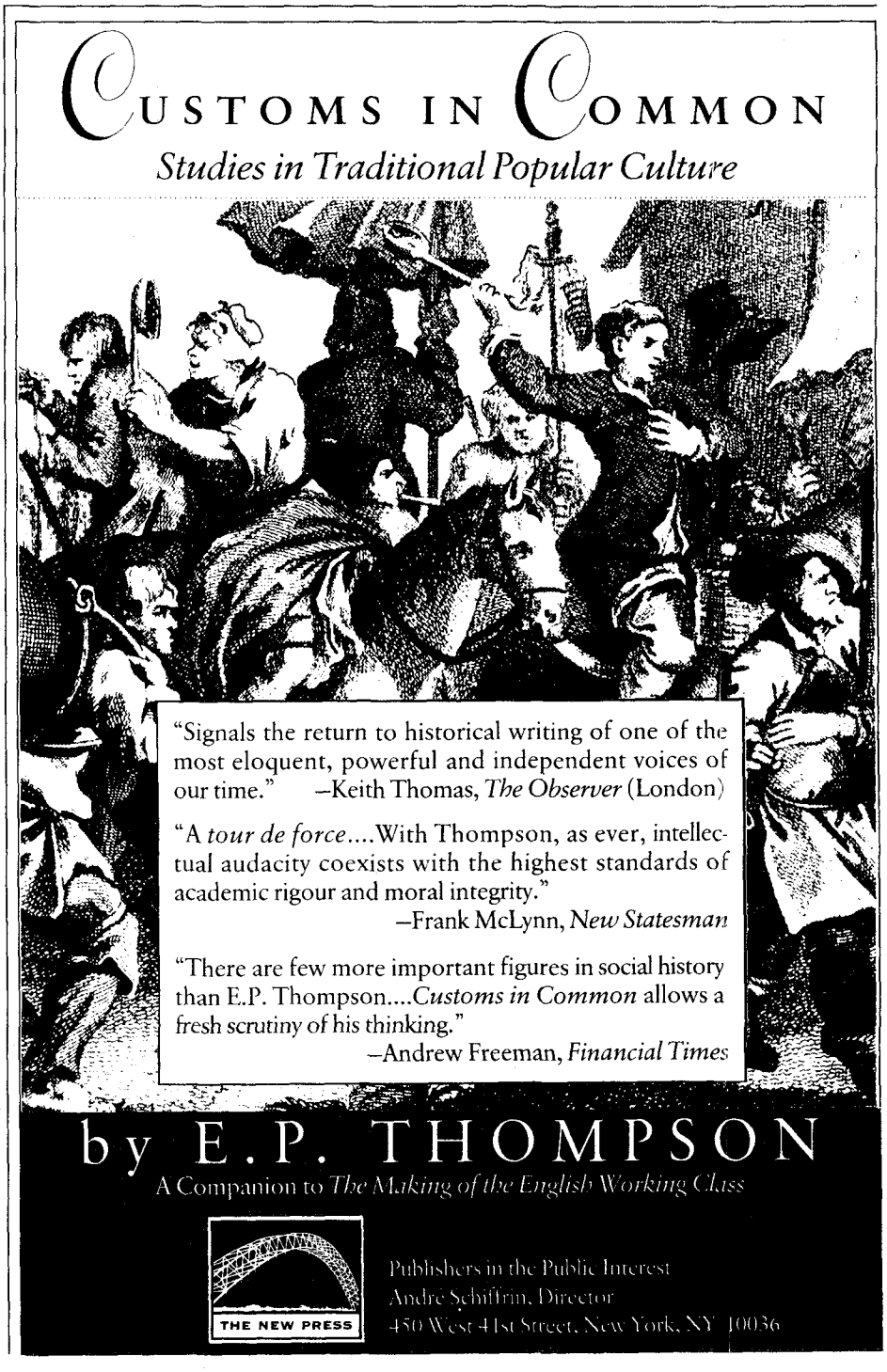
As a black militant with little regard or capacity for terror, what with his ever-present thick glasses and Anglophilia, the narrator joins the Heirs of Malcolm, a wonderfully imagined portrait of a slightly less militant, more inert version of the Black Panthers, where he researches "real" blackness. And to what end? His joining the Heirs was not unlike his parents' and grandparents' trucking on over to the N.A.A.C.P. to register *their* blackness. The narrator would never admit this because "I simply refused to see myself through his eyes," he says, referring to Grandfather Eustace, the model of the correct. "He had not a clue as to how free and complex I thought I was about to become . . . and how much a prisoner of the predetermined forces in black history I considered him to be."

Since *High Cotton*'s narrator was born into a position of relative privilege, he must speak of oppression from the fringes. But this distance allows him to see how oppressive history can be as well. Throughout the book, he is pulled between inclusion in one faction of his society (the Also Chosen) and exclusion from most others because of it. By not naming the narrator, Pinckney asks, via Ralph Ellison, Can one be enslaved by history, be "different" from that monolith, The Negro? And how does one begin? With Grandfather:

> The old-timers boasted of their ability to bug you from the grave, saying one day you'd want to talk to them and they wouldn't be there anymore. . . . Your dearest reminded you of the problem you would never, never get away from. However, escape I did, the burden of consciousness was lifted from my round little shoulders, and for a while there I was gorgeously out of it. . . . Grandfather Eustace was the Emperor of out-of-it, yet he was also a distinguished man who tried, in his way, to answer all the questions. . . . I spent much of my life running away from him, centripetal fashion, because he was, to me, just a poor old darky.

This portrait of Grandfather as darky is not revolting but necessary. Children begin to define themselves by reacting to what family members decree their lot to be: Negro or not, Also Chosen or not. The form of the reaction depends on the child. For one as grotesquely well-bred as the narrator of *High Cotton*, bookish and alone, taught to hold his Vaselined head high, refuge and even revenge can be found in wit, a mute rejoinder sounding in the head as Dad or Grandfather lectures on and on about responsibility-as-identity.

Pinckney's wit—distanced, learned—saves him, time and again, from first-novel sentimentality and self-absorption. Such nonwriting supported by nonthinking never appears in *High Cotton*. Pinckney elevates despair to the lyrical. From his earliest days in Indianapolis to eventually visiting Grandfather's home, "the Old Country" of the South, Pinckney's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narrator will not escape from knowing his name in the end:

> One day—if it comes—I may be someone's old darky, exercising my fictitious cultural birthright to run off at the mouth, telling someone who may insist on being called a Senufo-American how in my day so many—black, white and other—were afraid of black teenagers in big sneakers. . . . I will be on my feet and the Senufo-American will be suicidal to get away from me, as I sometimes felt in the presence of Grandfather. . . . I may elect myself a witness and undertake to remember when something more important than black, white and other was lost.

That loss may be inevitable, but writing one's name beautifully anyway is what *High Cotton* is about. The novel is a *Bildungsroman* that moves, albeit in "centripetal fashion," within a strict narrative line. Each of its twelve chapters begins a set of entirely new technical problems that Pinckney presents as questions about tone, mood, the representation of the narrator's truth or lack thereof. While these units are seemingly independent of one another, this is deceptive. One must rely on the author's absolute but unobtrusive control over his material, and his depiction of the narrator's sensibility, to realize just how much of a whole *High Cotton* is.

From the book's beginning, when we are introduced to Aunt Clara, a "high yellow" who is "as obsessed as Thomas Jefferson with the 'algebraical notation' of blood mixture," and Uncle Castor, a jazz musician who is Grandfather Eustace's brother and who "sailed on the Ile de France" and made "the Dolly Sisters laugh," *High Cotton* is, if anything, about the examination of character and the manner in which character is observed: What can one learn? Does this observation help to create a new self or avoid old mistakes?

As the narrator moves on to New York, where he meets Bargetta, "my only black friend at school [Columbia]," and especially later, working briefly for Djuna Barnes, language itself becomes a character in *High Cotton*. The people he prefers to observe are enthralled by the transformative power of words as well. And it is in language—avoided, created, experienced—that history can be spoken. Pinckney's author strains to avoid that history, but finds his voice in its bedrock on a return visit to the Old Country of Grandfather Eustace's youth. In the end is his beginning. An elegy will always speak the truth. What Pinckney has given him is the voice needed to write his name in the field of existence. □

Prizewinning Poets–1992

*The winners of Discovery–*The Nation *'92 are Carol Frome, Katherine McAlpine, Donald Platt and Heather Tosteson. A reading of their poems was scheduled for Monday, May 4, at The Poetry Center, 92nd Street Y in New York City. The contest was judged by Rika Lesser, Molly Peacock and Mark Rudman. Now in its eighteenth year, the competition combines The Poetry Center's Discovery contest and* The Nation*'s poetry prize. It is open to poets who have not published in book form.*

—Grace Schulman, poetry editor

FRESH PEACHES, FIREWORKS, & GUNS

Mozart once said that he wrote music
by finding the notes
that love one another and putting them

together. But remembering how
the dissonant opening bars of his string quartet
in C major grate

against each other and yet somehow cohere,
I like to think
he found a different kind of order,

the same principle
of musical composition that inspired the roadside sign
I saw on Rt. 29:

Fresh Peaches, Fireworks, & Guns.
It makes me do a U-
turn, pull over, and park among the rusted-out

pick-ups. Here,
under a striped awning, are pyramids of peaches,
"all local grown,"

the proprietor explains in a drawl whose vowels
almost drool
peach juice. Next to the flesh

of the fruit ripened
to the color of the sunset, shine the blue-black double barrels
of 12-gauge shotguns

and rows of brass shells. For sale, fresh peaches
and Smith & Wessons,
tempered steel and bruisable fruit, a collision/

collusion that makes
me feel suddenly fragile, a dissonance as pure
as Mozart's, two notes

never put together until now and now forever
inextricable.
After filling a paper bag with peaches, I walk

to the rack of fireworks,
roman candles, smoke bombs, firecrackers, sparklers
and the ones imported from China

with names like Colorful Bird, Ground Blossom Flower,
and Plum Flowers Report Spring.
There is even a firework called Happiness.

I buy them
for their names, imagine setting them off in celebration
of nothing but their own

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tailfeathers of shooting sparks, peony petals of light
opening and exploding,
then falling in a slow divertimento to the ground.

My head full of fireworks,
I pay for them and walk back to my car
in the breathless midsummer

heat, walk back to a world where road dust
has settled like talcum powder
over everything, over the pokeweed and trees of heaven,

over the gas pumps
and out-of-order Coke machine, over the mimosa
with its spike blossoms,

pink sparklers the tree holds in its hundred hands.
Dust has sugared
the battered bodies of the parked trucks

where, on a rear window,
someone has scrawled in a child's block letters
with a forefinger:

JESUS LOVES EVERYBODY EVEN NIGGERS.
Biting into a peach
I let its sweetness fill my mouth. Mozart,

there is no music
for this moment. I have only the taste
of peach juice mixed

with the grit of words I can't spit out,
nigger, 12-gauge
Georgia, Jesus, poontang, Ground Blossom Flower,

all these gutturals
grinding against each other as if words were stones
under a stutterer's

tongue, which keeps on stumbling over each syllable
until silence,
our final sentence, be said.

Donald Platt

PLUS Ç'EST LA MÊME CHOSE

lines written upon chaperoning the seventh grade dance

When did these little girls turn into women?
Lip-glossed and groomed, alarmingly possessed
of polish, poise and, in some cases, breasts,
they're clustered at one corner of the gym in
elaborate indifference to the boys,
who, at the other end, convene with cables,
adjusting speakers, tuners and turntables
to make the optimum amount of noise.
If nobody plans to dance, what's this dance for?
Finally the boys all gather in formation,
tentatively begin a group migration
across the fearsome distance of the floor—
and then retreat, noticing no one's there.
The girls have gone, en masse, to fix their hair.

Katherine McAlpine

WAITING FOR WINTER IN LA SARDINA LOCA

Mexican restaurants don't grow on trees
here on the far, hardbitten coast of Maine.
So, though the food lacks authenticity,
drink your Dos Equis, dear, and don't complain.
October, and the summer arty types
have shut up their boutiques and galleries, flown
south with the loons. A mean nor'easter gripes
off the breakwater, flaying soul and bone.
Longshoremen load their holds with potables;
the waiter yawns, fingers his flimsy tips.
The street outside's a flood of greedy gulls
who flock for the leftover nacho chips.
Fiesta music emanates from a tinned
marimba band. And winter's in the wind.

Katherine McAlpine

INTRUDER

Before he knew me well enough
to know, he chastened me,
you sure do have a lot of clothes.
Thinking back, I know how it went,
him going to my closet, viewing
my clothes, a series in relief,
casual shoulders leaning
against the closet wall. I think
how he might have pushed
the shoulder of a blazer,
then dropped his hand
to the sleeve of a cotton blouse
and fingered the absence of my arm.
And how he might have lifted
the hem of each skirt
to peer underneath, then gathered
my sweaters like bosoms,
how he might have laid his face
in them, inhaling
my cologne, and sweat, and maybe
his own cigarette smoke.
Once, I came home to find
a full-length lace nightgown
sheared off at the thigh
and hanging by a wire hanger,
haggard, and the stray threads
whispering around the edges,
like white hairs
about an old woman's face,
trying to tell me something.
So now I'm hoping it goes
unnoticed—how the hair on my arms
stands on end when I see
how he rolls the pages of a book
back, into a tube he holds tightly
as a resisting leg, as if he could keep
all they have to say for himself,
as if they didn't have a life
of their own. And how when he pauses
in his reading, he forces their wings
to spread from the spine
and leaves them splayed on the table,
unable to draw themselves close
or to fly.

Carol Frome

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JARS

1

The color is untrue. The glass blue as a scoured sky,
the cloth soft as the skin of newly culled olives.
The real cloth is garish, ochre, and the glass clear,
but the photograph assures me, with its dazzle of shadow,
the tonal integrity of the glass and the cloth,
that concentration tempers us,
anneals what at first appears irreconcilable or just
harsher than the eye could tolerate.
My life before. My life after.
What separates them is nothing
but breath and a million synapses
that don't fire anymore. A quieter world.
More beautiful. Mysteriously
bereft. The objects of my meditation
never existed, are nothing but chance
excitations. I recognize this in the same second
I recognize pleasure in its purest rush,
something deeper, more generous than lust,
but not unlike, dangerously, in fact, akin.
All my life I have been sure there is another world
inside the page, outside the glass, whose air is warmer
and more enveloping, the simple taste
and touch of which will save me.
Nothing like the dense red must that covers the retina
when I am resting deep within the spirit,
where in a landscape littered, like a highway in Iraq,
with scorched cars and trucks, scoured
by whirlwinds of sand and ash, a mother,
clutching her child to her chest, kneels
before an angel made of spare body parts.

2

The jar and the shadows it casts
tell irreconcilable stories.

A friend draws hundreds of triptychs
recounting the assault of the psyche:
The tumbling stones of Samson's temple,
the archangel Gabriel's whole weight shifting toward
his admonishing left arm, the figure clinging
to the rim of the funnel that is the seventh circle
of hell—Years later in the quiet that presages waking,
I see at last how perfectly composed they have always been,
these endless images of mythic destruction,
as if at the deepest level he always knew
there was a shape that could contain it—
all that anguish that felt so blind
and damaging, a caterwauling of souls
so primitive it still resonates
with the slightest graze of a man's skin.
And then I know, the way the sleeper waking in the dark knows,
before thought, before scent—
the hairs on the skin rising in warning—
something animate and untoward has approached.
Too close. Half a decade later, the tears course
down my cheeks. I wanted to say something
about forgiveness.

Heather Tosteson

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OutWrite '92

JAN CLAUSEN AND
ANDREA FREUD LOEWENSTEIN

How to convey an atmosphere of harrowing disaster infused with the creative ferment that can only happen in a culture's unofficial venues? A dispatch from the front lines of OutWrite '92, the third annual lesbian and gay writers conference, held in Boston March 20-22, cannot rest with juxtaposing despair and inspiration. It must portray them intermingled.

Melvin Dixon, author of the novel Vanishing Rooms, *describes his lover's recent death and his own grave illness. He uses the words of an old hymn to convey Richard's palpable presence: "He's everywhere, inside me, listening for his name."*

A panel on humor in writing about AIDS dissolves into uproarious laughter as the A.S.L. interpreter emphatically signs "jerking off."

"Don't lie to me, I'll call you on it," keynote speaker Dorothy Allison exhorts the opening night audience, describing how her new novel, Bastard out of Carolina, *came from "the edge of the hard stuff."*

What's a writing conference for, anyway? Why descend from the ennobling heights of lonely struggles with the language to mill and guzzle and gossip in cheesy hotel ballrooms? And why is this particular conference important enough to draw 1,500 lesbian, gay and bisexual writers (down slightly from OutWrite '91 attendance figures, but still extremely impressive for any radical cultural event)?

OutWrite organizer Michael Bronski has one answer: "I cannot overestimate the incredible feelings that happen when people who are usually engaged in the solitary act of writing come together," he says, and insists that this conference is "as much a political event as it is a literary one." It is also a social event. We check each other out: who has published, who has a new job, which couples are still together, which have parted. Who is sick, who is still well. Who are the newcomers, whose faces do we miss?

Jan Clausen's most recent books are The Prosperine Papers, *a novel (Crossing Press), and* Books & Life, *essays (Ohio State). Andrea Freud Loewenstein's second novel,* The Worry Girl *(Firebrand), has just been published.*

The quiet room. An old friend, a poet, lies exhausted on the floor, resting after a reading, preparing to give a panel presentation. Around him sit his friends and his lover, three women and a man.

Reading from new work, we look out into the audience and see a familiar face, wonder uneasily—in which bed, which town, how many years ago?

In the opening plenary, it's time for the roll call. As the spirit moves us, we rise from folding chairs and shout toward the ceiling the names of those lost in the past year. It is a strange challenge to guess the rhythm right, to try to time each name so that it doesn't conflict with others.

A community alive to the facts of historical erasure and all-too-current censorship battles knows that the integrity of words on the page must be backed by heroic efforts to insure their place in the world. So OutWrite is also about the survival of the institutions that support writers and writing.

This year, fundraising appeals for periodicals endangered by the recession took on special resonance. To many, it was particularly painful that the venerable Boston-based weekly *Gay Community News* should be threatened. All of the conference organizers are or have been affiliated with *G.C.N.*, including coordinator Sue Hyde. Their vision for the conference grew out of what Bronski called *G.C.N.*'s "commitment to lesbians and gay men working together, its progressive politics, its antiracist stance." The national quarterly *OUT/LOOK*, organizer of the first two OutWrites and co-sponsor of this year's event, also faces an uncertain future.

Historically, access to print has been so crucial for lesbians and gay men partly because they have been denied representation in other media. For many of the most isolated, reading matter mailed in the proverbial plain brown wrapper is still a lifeline to community and culture. But in recent years, the staggering toll of HIV has added a new dimension. The sense not merely of unbearable single losses but of their unfathomable repetition saturated the conference: in all the talk of writing about AIDS, with AIDS, despite AIDS, against AIDS, and in the names of those recently dead who ought to have been present (such as George Stambolian, editor of the *Men on Men* anthology series; Craig Harris, whose "I'm Going to Go Out Like a Fucking Meteor" was read on Friday night; Allen Barnett, author of *The Body and Its Dangers*). One member of the organizing committee had to curtail his participation because of illness. Two others had to pull out temporarily when close friends became critically ill.

In the context of our need to do far more than survive even as we die, our words—and our choice of words—take on new urgency. "Don't be satisfied with survival," Dorothy Allison warned, sounding a pervasive theme. "I'm interested in a whole lot more." In the Outspoken Literary Series, writers read their work to large intent audiences. A series of writing workshops filled up during the first two hours of the conference.

During the question session following a panel called "Queer Writers Teaching Writing," assembled teachers and students call out their stories of coming out or deciding not to come out in the classroom—of taunts and triumphs, of teaching the gay and lesbian books. Afterward, someone pounces on the moderator: "I needed to say something and you never called on me! It was important!"

The panel is on translation, and we are talking about words. "I realized 'gay' and 'lesbian' don't translate into Russian," a woman explains, "because there is no out community there. So I started to use 'queer.' And I almost lost my job."

The panel is called "Writing From the Body," and one by one the panelists share stories of abuse—and of words that broke through the damage. A man quotes Adrienne Rich: "It is the body's world/ they are trying to destroy forever."

OutWrite is the single most important literary event for queer writers, but that's not all. By any definition that refuses this country's common and unnatural separation between art and activism, it is one of the most important literary events of any sort. Or as keynoter Allan Gurganus remarked, "This culture needs us more than we need it." OutWrite is a glimpse of what it could mean to reunite that which has been severed—to revitalize the Word in an epoch hooked on images. Despite the trend toward slicker-looking gay and lesbian publications, despite the sign in the book exhibit boasting "WE'RE HERE, WE'RE QUEER, WE TAKE CREDIT CARDS," it is about the power of precommodified language.

It is also about inclusion—and exclusion. The grass-roots orientation means,

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by any mainstream standard, a minimum of divisions between "stars" and audience. Still, for some there are plenary-session speeches and, not incidentally, free publicity for commercial-press books, gay fiction that will make its way in B. Dalton. For many who publish with small presses, on the other hand, this conference is the only place where they will be stopped in the hall: "I just want you to know I loved your book. I tried to order it for my class. I'm sorry it's out of print."

For others, some of whom have been writing equally long, there has been no publication. Infrequently, there is a reminder of those who would never come to such a conference, those for whom this community is foreign territory, those who do not read.

An African-American lesbian raises her hand to describe her unease at the fact that her writing has no meaning in the lives of the low-income women of color she encounters at her job. The two male authors to whom she speaks, one black and one white, both severely ill, do not appear much interested in this question, though it echoes the concern that Chilean-born writer Mariana Romo-Carmona expressed in her keynote speech: "If we talk about survival, it must be the survival of all of us . . . those who wait on tables, not just those who go on the dinner cruises."

Although most of us are not dressed for a dinner cruise, we know one another in the lobby by our clothes and haircuts, a note of understated quality, denim and silk and cotton, varied by a splash of leather, a spangle or spike.

A bat mitzvah is going on in one of the hotel's several ballrooms. Exquisitely groomed 13-year-old girls dressed as miniature ladies in lowcut gowns and stiffly styled hair clutch each other and giggle as their parents shepherd them through the crowds of gay and lesbian writers fresh from the Jewish caucus meeting.

In the first-floor bar, surrounded by convention-goers and tourists, a drag queen, all sparkling silver hair and jutting bosom, gestures with a glass of champagne as she holds forth to her friends.

Any annual conference takes place against the backdrop of predecessors. The spectrum of political opinion at OutWrite '91 was largely defined by responses to controversial remarks by Edward Albee, who positioned himself as "a writer who is gay" rather than "a gay writer" and chastised African-Americans for "an extraordinary growing separatism." This year Dorothy Allison criticized Albee's "tragic" failure to connect black and gay liberation, and organizers stressed their commitment to multiculturalism. Nevertheless, the event saw its share of conflict over identity issues and the power relationships they imply.

In an open meeting held early Saturday evening, Jacquie Bishop of Mama Doesn't Know Productions and poet Essex Hemphill read a protest statement signed by more than 150 black writers. They objected to the attempt made by white-run Alyson Publications to establish a new literary award named for the late Joseph Beam, editor of the path-breaking *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*. Alyson turned the award over to *OUT/LOOK* magazine to administer, and black writers were omitted from both the planning process and the list of those nominated. As the meeting proceeded, it quickly became clear that the awards ceremony would not take place, and the course shifted from what Bishop characterized as a too-familiar if inevitable "reactive mode" to energetic plans for a new award under black community control.

A quieter controversy erupted over the absence of panels dealing with specifically Jewish concerns, the lack of identified Jewish presence in "multicultural" panels and the omission of anti-Semitism as part of the antiracist commitment.

At a panel called "Identity, Visibility, Activism: Asian/American Writers," a young man insists he is not *"Asian-American." "I was brought up under a* Chinese *roof!" A punky young California woman, her head shaved except for a small frontal topknot, replies that her "quirky art background" always made her feel she didn't fit anywhere, but the hyphenated term has helped her achieve a sense of belonging. Conference organizer Karin Aguilar-San Juan jumps in to point out the limits to identity politics. She wants, she says, to push for Asian-American* activism.

Following the translation panel, a member of the audience gets up to make the point that North Americans define Latin American literature as that which has made it into English translation. He stops himself in mid-sentence: "Latin American is your *term. We refer to ourselves by nationality." An African woman comments, "It is a question of how to be fluent in one another's language. Language is a way to negotiate each other's spaces. We pretend to know, but we do not know how."*

If AIDS has prompted lesbians and gay men to develop a deepened relationship to the written word, it has surely had a parallel effect on their connection to one another. Ten years ago, before most people grasped how cruelly the epidemic would lacerate the male community, OutWrite would have been impossible, because ten years ago even lesbians who rejected gender separatism in theory were often separatist in practice. Important questions remain about the extent to which it has become possible to say "lesbianandgay" in one meaningful breath. Novelist and pornographer John Preston's observation that certain queer male authors seem on the verge of unprecedented canonical respectability defined one crucial subdivision. Another emerged in a black woman's tart remark: "I want to sit down with some brothers and hear the word 'feminist' come out of their mouth without stumbling over the 'f.' "

Still, it is difficult for women who have always resented male privilege to hold on to that resentment when, for the first time, men are the ones most endangered. It is difficult for men who have always disdained women to disdain those who stand by them in the crisis. More and more, lesbians and gay men seem to have a genuine sense of being on each other's side.

"I may not be alive next year to attend the conference," Melvin Dixon told the closing session. "But I'll be somewhere, listening for my name." We are writing with urgency, in whatever time is left to us. For the unquiet dead, and for those coming up. No wonder that OutWrite '92 was so remarkably free of cynicism, more-correct-than-thou posturing and careerist maneuvers. Now that we finally understand the stakes, we are writing as though it matters. □

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VIDEOS.

BEN SONNENBERG

Black, Brown and Beige

Six of these seven movies show how the typing of blacks in America has led with almost equal ease to cross-burning, comedy and the blues. All are documentaries; only the last one cheerful. Robbie Henson's *Trouble Behind* (56 minutes; California Newsreel) tells of Corbin, Kentucky (Pop. 7413), famous as the original home of Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken. Henson, born thirty-four years ago in a nearby town, lays bare a place with whites only. Corbin's near-total absence of blacks is an eerie thing. Driving through Corbin with Henson, a black historian says, "It seems like you go through any other town as long as we've been going and you would see at least some older blacks at the courthouse area or somewhere." But not here. Once a fairly prosperous town, Corbin failed when the railroad did: a sad end made tragic, in Henson's view, by a single event seven decades ago. One night in October 1919 a posse of Corbin whites rounded up all the blacks, hanged a few of the men, burned to death a few more and sent all the rest, women and children too, out of town in boxcars. Henson gives this information swiftly, almost casually. A title card tells us that in 1919 the Klan was resurgent and race riots were country-wide; and in being shown, also swiftly, the town's labor history, we see (but are not made to contemplate) the sorry knot of racism and unemployment. White railroad workers go off to war; Southern blacks are imported to take their place; the whites return and reclaim their jobs; the old rigid types of the Brute (ancestor of Willie Horton) and the Uppity Neegrow are revived.

Henson shows us a blighted town. His Corbin is plagued and fallow and cursed, as much by the long-ago crime as by the stories the townspeople tell. In a hilarious series of present-day interviews, Henson draws out their myths. He knows these are heirloom lies, so to speak, shaped to be handed down; and he knows how essential a slow hand is with such toxic stuff. Henson is told by a courtly man in a big handsome hat that a Christian like him "can get out on the street one Saturday night and get drunk and get arrested" and the rest of his life he's known as a drunk. "And I think," he goes on to Henson, "this kinda applies to the misconception of the racial situation in Corbin, Kentucky. One night they had a problem and it's always stayed with us. Primarily, I think, because blacks did not choose to come back and be with us anymore." Intercut with this speech are scenes of a teenager's party, shot with a hand-held camera by Doron Schlair, Henson's gifted cinematographer. All is jeering and leering and beer guzzling. When asked what he thinks of blacks coming to live in Corbin, one teenager says, "O.K., so long as they look like Whitney Houston." For contrast, Henson gives us a black woman's memory of a cross being burned in front of her house in Corbin when she was a little girl and an interview with a black man who used to play football for a neighboring high school, who tells how frightened his team always was when it had to play Corbin, because, he says, they *hated* blacks there, stoning the bus and once dropping a cinderblock through the windshield. I admire this strong, well-edited film both for Henson's self-effacement in the interviews and for its not insisting on what Corbin is telling us. Mostly, I admire Henson's confident sanity in giving the racists the best comic lines.

Tom, Pickaninny, Mammy, Coon. These are the stereotypes made benign first by children's books and household goods, next by stage shows and movies, and finally by radio and TV. The latter part of this story is told in two amply detailed documentaries by Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions* and *Color Adjustment* (57 and 87 minutes; California Newsreel). The former deals mostly with radio, the latter with TV. The Public Broadcasting System showed *Notions* in 1987; it promises *Color Adjustment* for June. *Color Adjustment* goes up only to 1988, or Riggs might have included a show like *Cops*, with its own black criminal stereotype. You'll be glad Riggs stopped where he did. He likes to moralize. In *Color Adjustment*, you're having great fun watching Mammy beget *Beulah* and *Amos 'n' Andy* beget *Sanford and Son*, while *Julia* and *I Spy* are helping beget *The Cosby Show* and *The Jeffersons*, but before you can think for yourself how problematic your pleasure is, Riggs starts

Ben Sonnenberg, author of Lost Property: Memoirs & Confessions of a Bad Boy *(Summit Books), writes regularly about videos for* The Nation.

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intercutting news clips of the Newark and Watts riots, brief apologies by producers, context-setting mini-lectures by well-known academics and sober reflections by Esther Rolle (*Good Times*) and Diahann Carroll (*Julia*). For Riggs it seems there is a Truth out there somewhere on TV. (Call for Marshall McLuhan!) Also, most disappointingly, Riggs for some reason touches hardly at all on the long, complex history of black performers (Redd Foxx, Moms Mabley) making use of the crudest black stereotypes in front of black audiences.

Riggs's earlier *Tongues Untied* is an hourlong film that Patrick Buchanan and Jesse Helms have used in their attacks on the Public Broadcasting System and the National Endowment for the Arts. *Tongues Untied*, about being black and gay, was shown last summer in PBS's *Point of View* series; some stations declined to air it for being "too explicit." It relies on personal statements by Riggs and on readings by actors of his and other men's poems. In between are shots of black gay types, most regular-looking, some florid, as well as a single bright sequence about the sign language *Snap!* Then all of a sudden there appear black-and-white stills and movies of Martin Luther King; color movies of a Gay Pride march; more black-and-white stills, shown slowly, of newspaper obits of young black men with AIDS; and more recollections by Riggs of his own uneasy days in the Castro, bringing *Tongues Untied* to the conclusion, on a title card, that "Black men loving black men is *the* revolutionary act." You don't have to believe that *the* revolutionary act was the beheading of Charles the First, the Boston Tea Party or even the Stonewall riot to find this conclusion silly. It leaves you with the feeling that whatever is controversial in *Tongues Untied* is at the approximate level of, say, *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Wild Women Don't Have the Blues (California Newsreel) is an hourlong work, directed by Christine Dall, about the "Queens" of the blues, principally Bessie Smith, who in bearing and extravagance predict Aretha Franklin and Patti LaBelle. The tradition begins with Ma Rainey; the title comes from her, too. *Wild Women* is meant for the classroom and so pays due attention to how such worldly music began in the fields and the church. But its exuberant subjects soon shoot it out of school into space. There it gets boosts from Ida Goodson and Koko Taylor, the jazz musicians who narrate the film, and also from the great Alberta Hunter (shown without interruption doing two lewd blues songs at the Cookery, in New York City, not that long ago).

Lady Day, The Many Faces of Billie Holiday (Kultur Video), also one hour long, is a documentary directed by Matthew Seig. Loosely pinned to *Lady Sings the Blues*, the 1972 autobiography written with (really by) William Dufty and read here by Ruby Dee, the movie does everything possible to subvert the book. I applaud this eccentric way of making a documentary. The trumpeter Buck Clayton and the singers Annie Ross and Carmen McRae are Seig's conspirators, and the movie does much to take Holiday back from the sentimental and commercial worlds to the musical. If for no other reason, *Lady Day* must be seen for the very long session of "Fine & Mellow"—shot in the early fifties, I'd guess, with Ben Webster, Lester Young and Roy Eldridge—which shows you how perfectly beautifully Holiday listened to other musicians.

Bruce Ricker's grand and glorious *The Last of the Blue Devils, The Kansas City Jazz Story*, released theatrically in 1979, is at last on videotape (90 minutes; Rhapsody Films). It begins in the usual way. A dozen or so "elder statesmen" of jazz—like Jay McShann, Joe Turner, Jesse Price—gather in Kansas City in 1974 at the musicians' old union hall, a dilapidated building in a forsaken part of town, for a celebration of the glory days when all were members of the Oklahoma City Blue Devils, which became Count Basie's first band and traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, at the "invitation" of the Prendergast political machine. Old men remembering, that sort of thing—the conventional documentarian's line on which to hang archival film footage. Except that the framing camerawork is unusually good. And except that (big exception!) Basie himself is suddenly there. The archival film clips when they finally come are truly wonderful. A duet by Charlie Parker and Dizzie Gillespie, Lester Young in the thirties, a Basie band in the sixties, another Basie band in the twenties. . . . And then back to the reunion, with Joe Turner singing to Basie and Jay McShann on piano. This loving documentary seems to have been as much improvised as scripted (in fact I heard Ricker say more or less that on the radio the other day). *The Last of the Blue Devils* is itself a jam session in which the cameramen (Arnie Johnson and Eric Menn) and editor (Thomasin Henckel) are prominent soloists. "A very happy film," *The New York Times*'s critic concluded when the movie opened. To which I would add only, "And now you can buy it cheap from Rhapsody Films."

For mail-order rental, try Video Library, 7175 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19119, or Home Film Festival, P.O. Box 2032, Scranton, PA 18501. California Newsreel is at 149 9th Street, #420, San Francisco, CA 94103. The address of Rhapsody Films is P.O. Box 179, New York, NY 10014. □

EXCHANGE.

(*Continued From Page 650*)

hero nor as villain, I have earned disdain from both sides of the political spectrum.

It is time to pay attention to the facts about the cornerstone years of the early 1960s, and time to stop worrying so much about what "effect" they might have. Too much attention to form instead of substance is stultifying—especially when the task before us is the reconstruction of a period in our history that has been suppressed and kept under lock and key. Cockburn should hit the books for a while; study the old documents and look at those newly declassified; maybe even interview some of the key participants while they are still alive.

Above all, Cockburn should discuss this subject with scholars of different persuasions. He should do so not to provide comic relief for *Nation* readers but to genuinely promote the search for truth. If we can transform the discussion in such a manner, I will be the first one listening. *John Newman*

HUNKERED IN THE BUNKER

Northampton, Mass.

I find it very disturbing that *The Nation* has allowed itself to become a visible part of the anti-*JFK* campaign sweeping the media. The discussion about *JFK* is not a trivial event; it goes to the heart of American political consciousness and potential strategies for change. Over the years, as defenders of the Warren Commission have fought back against criticism with more and more arcane scientific tests piled onto a rickety structure of ever-diminishing credibility, they have established that it is not impossible (though it remains at best highly unlikely) for the lone-gunman hypothesis to withstand forensic doubts. What they have not done, because it cannot be done, is to show a persuasive chain of evidence supporting that hypothesis in the face of testimony from dozens of eyewitnesses to the contrary. Because of that circumstance, it has become crucial for anyone who thinks it important to arrive at an understanding of the assassination to focus on motive and milieu: If there was a conspiracy, then there ought to have

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been plausible grounds for a conspiracy, those grounds ought to be visible, and the real evidence demonstrating Oswald's involvement should fit into the conspiracy scenario without any difficulty.

However, attention has been drawn away from the real conspiracy scenario by one wonderfully bizarre scene in *JFK* in which it is suggested that Kennedy's (alleged) decision to withdraw from Vietnam led to high-level military involvement in the assassination plot. Oliver Stone, Peter Dale Scott and others have hunkered themselves more and more firmly into that probably indefensible bunker, into which a withering fire has been poured, by Alexander Cockburn and others. This entirely incidental debate, therefore, is in danger of obscuring the real demonstration (made more persuasively by Jim Garrison than anyone else, in his *On the Trail of the Assassins*) of a right-wing conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy.

I speak as one who protested against Kennedy's policies at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, who at the time of the test ban treaty gave a speech to a chapter of SANE in which I said that the test ban was not nearly as significant as the fact that in Vietnam the United States was following "the same fatal path as the French Fourth Republic," and who like most liberals and leftists of the time was furious at the pusillanimous way the Administration was handling its own civil rights bill. In other words, I absolutely shared the perception of Kennedy as a conservative cold warrior; so then did most of us on the left (not, obviously, Oliver Stone). However, what is not being understood today is that the left's view of Kennedy, even if it was a truthful view, in no way determined what the right thought of him. In fact, to see how easily right-wing conspiracy theory is compatible with a left structural analysis of the cold war liberal establishment, we can recall that when G. William Domhoff wrote *The Higher Circles*, he had to append a chapter in which he tried to distinguish his critique of that establishment from those of the radical right. That is, people on the right were convinced that men we thought of as conservatives were actually agents of the international Bolshevik conspiracy.

This was exactly the case with J.F.K., who at the time of his assassination was undoubtedly the most hated man in America. But he was hated by the right, not the left. There were no left-wing circles in which Oswald could have discussed assassination or found feelings that might have motivated it, but on the right it was easy! There was a price on J.F.K.'s head. From Miami to Dallas (the center of right-wing extremism), there was talk of getting rid of him, and I well remember that in Dallas there were classrooms where teachers led the students in cheers on the day he was killed.

Why? The Bay of Pigs, the nuclear test ban treaty and the civil rights bill. We can forget all those structural analyses about how the objective conditions of capitalism and imperialism really foredoomed the invasion and demanded those other initiatives. The fact is that from (some of) the right's point of view, Kennedy was clearly at the very center of a conspiracy to take over the United States and deliver it to Russia. In short, *he was a traitor.* It doesn't matter if today we think that was nonsense; it doesn't matter if it was nonsense; thousands upon thousands of Americans believed it, and many of them were prepared to do something about it. (These are some of the same Americans who, years later, gave money to Oliver North because they thought the Russians were going to invade Texas through Nicaragua.) And that was exactly the conspiratorial milieu, so brilliantly depicted by Stone, in which Oswald moved when he was in New Orleans. And these were exactly the people with the resources and connections to provide all the emblemata of conspiracy that so many people saw in Dallas: fake Secret Service I.D.s, clean-cut "hobos" and the rest of it, not to mention Oswald's "legend" as a Communist and pro-Castro activist. Were there such people in the C.I.A. or F.B.I., whose help would have been essential? Does that question, in the era of James Jesus Angleton, even need to be asked? That is precisely where they were most likely to be found, most especially given that Kennedy had purged the leadership of the C.I.A. Nor is it necessary to posit (Stone doesn't) some overarching C.I.A./F.B.I./Mafia/military intelligence/anti-Castro institutional conspiracy, for there had been (and was to be again in the future) plenty of overlapping activity and cooperation among selected members of these organizations and groups, as in the continuing plot to assassinate Castro.

Indeed, in that milieu of right-wing anti-Communist (and racist) hysteria it is even possible that Kennedy *was* seen as soft on Vietnam, and that this perception did trigger participation in an assassination plot, or at least in covering it up. Many of these people were and still are capable of seeing the Devil's work everywhere, even in a single word; thus a rationalist, documentary examination of the putative grounds for their belief, the exact wording of NSAM 263 or 273 or whatever, outside its demonizing historical context, is completely beside the point.

Does any of this matter? Yes it does, very much so. Lenin once said that parliamentary government was "the best possible shell for capitalism." From this standpoint, democracy is just a sham, and it's foolish to make a big to-do over some alleged deviation from its conditions of legitimacy. I'd hardly want to deny that capitalism and imperialism are a large part of the truth of our democracy, and compromise it gravely. But they are not the whole truth, and it is not without its own unfolding meaning, its own dynamic. This is what Stone correctly understands. For many of us on the left, the elections of 1964, 1972 and 1980 were, each in its distinctive way, fatally compromised. The entire system, the entire contemporary historical period, therefore reeks of illegitimacy—exactly as Stone laments. Of course, some of the historical shift of the past thirty years is what "the people"

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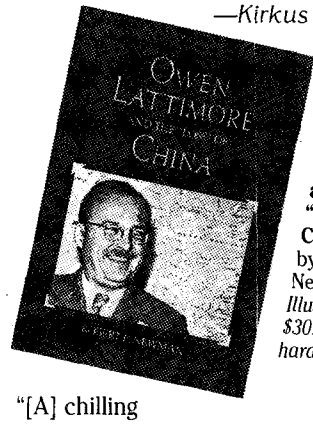

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have wanted, and some of it is what capital has demanded. But to blame "the people" or capitalism for all that befalls us is in either case a recipe for political paralysis. The people are not going to rebel against themselves, and they're apparently not yet ready to rebel against "capital" or exploitation or the logic of the market either. But an extraordinary number of people have already been moved by, and are responding to, Stone's revival of the assassination conspiracy. Therefore, it's not a self-delusion for us on the left to think that who killed Kennedy is important; making the case that Stone has tried to make may be one of the most useful things we can do for progressive political renewal. *Philip Green*

LIEBELER REPLIES

Malibu, Calif.

Stone claims the illustration of the single bullet theory in Alexander Cockburn's interview of me was "swiped in toto from a January 19 article in *New York Newsday*." It comes from Volume VI (p. 54) of the House Assassinations Committee Hearings. If either Stone or his ghostwriters had looked there, they would know Connally was seated 8 centimeters lower than the President, whose upper body was leaning forward between 11 and 18 degrees, while the road sloped down 3 degrees. Estimates of the path of the bullet through Kennedy's body ranged from slightly upward to 4 degrees downward if he was sitting in a vertical position, which he was not. Given those parameters I look forward to Stone's drawing showing how "the bullet would have had an upward trajectory upon leaving Kennedy."

"The *Newsday*-cum-*Nation* drawing" is crude only in the sense Kennedy is shown sitting erect and the car level. But the House committee used the drawing only to illustrate the slope of the bullet trajectory, which (surprise!) led back to the upper southeast corner of the Texas Schoolbook Depository.

Stone also claims there is no way to prove the lone-gunman thesis, since the Warren Commission, absent access to the autopsy photographs and X-rays, erred in locating the entrance wounds. I will not defend this handling of the photographs and X-rays. After placing the wounds correctly, however, the House committee unanimously affirmed the commission's finding that the President was hit only by two bullets fired by Oswald from the rear. *Wesley J. Liebeler*

COCKBURN REPLIES

Petrolia, Calif.

These letters, fraudulent in the case of Stone, flatulent in the case of Newman and Green, offer a fitting résumé of the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of the *JFK* sponsors and their claque, not the least of whose vices is their voracious consumption of valuable time and space. Much of their complaint has, after all, been addressed in an earlier exchange.

Stone's admonition to me not to "misinform the public in the name of commerce" is matchless effrontery. The film from which he stands to make millions is undoubtedly one of the most willfully error-riddled pieces of "historical reconstruction" in the history of cinema. Like all demagogues Stone is now a full-blown megalomaniac given to such sentiments (announced grandly at a Nation Institute symposium at Town Hall) that "Even when I'm wrong, I'm right." As his ludicrous mistake about the illustration I included in my Liebeler interview shows, he is wholly ignorant of the basic forensic, evidentiary and historical record, and is dependent on compliant "researchers" who tell him what he wants to hear. Any fact inhospitable to his preposterous überconspiracy is blandly denied. Example: In *JFK*, David Ferrie confesses to his involvement in the conspiracy. No such confession was made, as is clear even from Garrison's book. Aha, said Stone at the Town Hall event, the confession was made to one of Garrison's assistants. Ed Epstein, author of books on the Warren Commission and on Garrison, called this assistant, who said that Ferrie had done nothing of the sort and that the story was nonsense from start to finish. So far as historical scruple goes, Stone makes Cecil B. De Mille look like Braudel. One of the most squalid aspects of the whole affair is that Time-Warner plans to distribute "documentary materials" about the assassination to schoolchildren.

In tune with the fascist aesthetic of his movie, Stone now mounts the traditional fascist defense: He, like Kennedy, is victim of a gigantic conspiracy, and "the media have bought wholesale the lies and distortions passed down from Washington." Passed down by whom? Let's have precision here. In *The Nation*'s case, exactly who pulled together myself and four other writers variously critical of Stone's version of history and "passed down" to us the necessary "lies and distortions"? It's one thing—not uncommon—to extract money from the public under false pretenses. It's another, à la Stone, to whine all the way to the bank.

But then whining has been a characteristic of Warren Commission critics down the years. Ever since the late 1960s they have successfully dominated debate, yet they still pretend that theirs is the persecuted and unpopular posture. I interviewed Liebeler because I think that the commission's conclusions, particularly in light of the 1978 House inquiry, are a good deal more plausible and soundly based than is commonly supposed. Most conspiracy mongers are either imbeciles or mountebanks, as I discovered when I did several months research, back in the early 1970s, on the murder of Robert Kennedy. In that case the "critics" couldn't even be bothered to find out which way R.F.K. was looking when he was shot. Absent this basic information, they invented another gunman in that crowded kitchen alley. What was striking in the wake of the Liebeler interview was readers' outrage that I had presumed to take a Warren Commission lawyer seriously. For this I was promptly labeled a Stalinist. (This latter term is being devalued with relentless speed. Before me is a letter savagely denouncing me as a Stalinist for my support of Jerry Brown.) But the commission staffers were conscientious people, of widely varied political opinion. They have been steadily libeled down the years, culminating in the oafish abuse by Stone, who espouses the most preposterous theory of all, aside from anything else requiring total suspension of disbelief, since not one among the several hundreds if not thousands party to this imagined conspiracy has ever surfaced, even on deathbed or in post mortem testimonial, to admit participating in the mighty plot.

Newman's letter is hot air from start to finish. I did him the courtesy of working my way carefully through his book, and offering—in my detailed reply published here on March 9—copious illustration of why he is a very bad historian who failed to prove his thesis and who indeed offered convincing evidence to prove the very opposite of his contention. There was nothing ad hominem in my remarks, just as there is nothing substantive in his defense. Indeed, his letter is a remarkable confession of defeat, relying upon slabs of pompous verbiage hauled painfully out of the dictionary. I kept waiting for the phrase "mere persiflage," but maybe Newman is saving that one up for the next time.

Green is the silliest of the lot. God help any youngster at Smith on the receiving end of this popcorn machine of self-regarding blather. What is it with the Five Colleges? Green and Michael Klare form a kind of toxic belt of data-free maundering stretching clear across I-91 from Northampton to Amherst, impeding all respectable intellectual traffic.

Like Stone, Green is ignorant of the record and furthermore declares that it doesn't matter anyway. Anyone who maintains, as he does, that Jim Garrison makes a persuasive case for "a right-wing conspiracy" should be confined to a lunatic asylum. Garrison was a berserk self-publicist with a penchant for locking up journalists who inconvenienced him—a trait that has earned him Stone's rapturous respect.

Notice how Green, like Stone, dismisses reality whenever its breath gets uncomfortably hot on his neck. All of a sudden "the exact wording" of "NSAM 263 or 273 or whatever[!] . . . is completely beside the point." So history doesn't matter at all, beyond what Green or Stone claims that history to be. Green covers himself here by saying that it's the right-wing nuts who care nothing for detail. But he's the one who deals only in the fake currency of mood, *Zeitgeist* and other impalpable categories.

"For many of us," Green writes, "the elections of 1964, 1972 and 1980 were . . . fatally compromised. The entire system, the entire contemporary historical period, therefore reeks of illegitimacy." Does he think that the fifties, when the A.C.L.U. refused to defend victims of McCarthyism, were somehow more "legitimate"? What was so illegitimate about the

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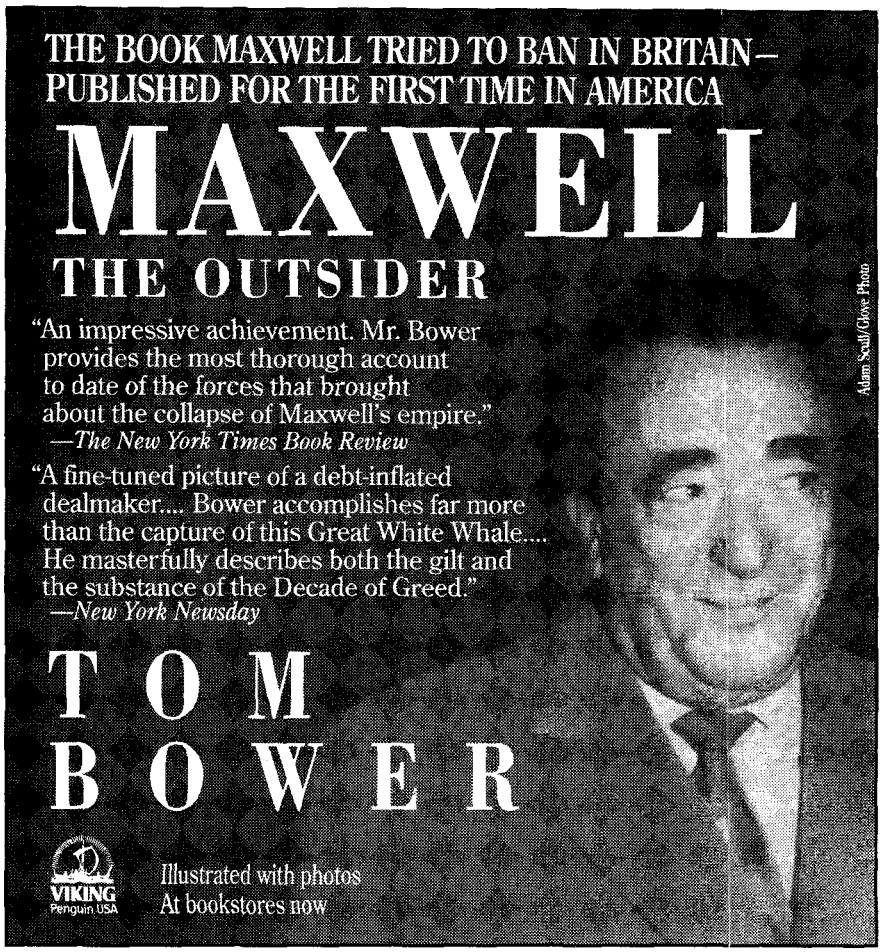
1964 election, in which the proclaimed agendas of L.B.J. and Goldwater presented as clear a choice as any in our lifetime? And why is the election of 1960, which J.F.K. stole with the help of Mayor Daley of Chicago, somehow more legitimate than that of 1980?

Everything Green says is either wrong or irrelevant. His inference is that because the credibility of the Warren Commission is low, its critics must be right. This claim is endlessly popular: "Seventy percent of the American people now believe there was a conspiracy, the Warren Commission was wrong," etc., etc. According to a 1991 Gallup poll, 81 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is "the inspired word of God." Only 9 percent of Americans believe that man has developed over millions of years from less advanced life forms without divine intervention; 47 percent of Americans believe that God created man in essentially the present form all at one time within the past 10,000 years.

Kennedy, writes Green, "at the time of his assassination was undoubtedly the most hated man in America." As Presidents go, J.F.K. was always pretty well regarded. The Gallup poll taken in November 1963 gave him a 58 percent approval rating, up from his lowest ebb of 56 percent two months earlier. In the summer of 1960, Eisenhower had an all-time low approval rating of 49 percent. L.B.J.'s, in August 1968, stood at 35 percent. Carter bottomed out in July 1979 at 28 percent, and George Bush has dropped to 39 percent twice already this year. Of course, Green would say that the conspirators hated J.F.K. in a more violent and ultimately lethal way. More than Johnson was hated by foes of the Great Society or, for that matter, of the war? Or Bush by some Jews? There is always someone around who will applaud a President's passing. (If a real conspiracy by the elites against a President is desired, look not at 1963 but at 1980. All the conspiracy mongering about the October Surprise throws a smokescreen in front of the obvious overt conspiracy by the militarists against Carter. As Gary Sick remarks at the start of his book, while clearly regarding it as only prolegomenon to the big stuff, military officers betrayed to the press the intended rescue attempts of the hostages. This was treason. On an almost hourly basis high-level Pentagon officials transported secret documents to the Jack Anderson column and similarly favored sources, seeking to show how Carter was betraying the national interest by sapping America's strength. This was the true and successful coup d'état unfolding every day in the press.)

Green's letter is at least useful in that it musters in one place almost everything foolish said about *JFK*, as in "an extraordinary number of people have already been moved by, and are responding to, Stone's revival of the assassination conspiracy." This is the *JFK*-as-radical-catalyst thesis, for which no evidence exists. Assume that everything in *JFK* is true. Then what? How is this meant to be politically invigorating, except to those who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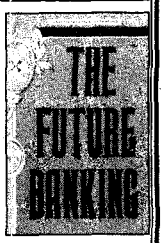

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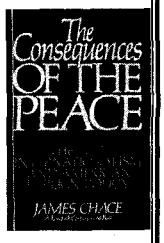

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accept the logic and rush down to Washington to assassinate Robert Gates and the Joint Chiefs of Staff? In political terms, apropos the effect of *JFK*, Chip Berlet hit the nail on the head when he quoted Wilhelm Reich's observation that "reactionary concepts plus revolutionary emotion result in Fascist mentality." Berlet has detailed how *JFK* has been used most productively by the far right, who naturally swarm like hummingbirds to a vision of the world so exactly in tune with their own. This is not to say that in material terms *JFK* has not been of great profit to its sponsors, such as Bill Schaap and Ellen Ray (new house in the Catskills), Jim Garrison (millions in royalties), Oliver Stone and indeed the producer of *JFK*, Arnon Milchan. Milchan, incidentally, was identified in one 1989 Israeli report as "probably [Israel's] largest arms dealer." A company he owned was once caught smuggling nuclear weapons fuses to Iraq. As part of a joint Israeli-South African government operation—"Muldergate"—he acted as launderer to money scheduled to quell liberal publications opposing apartheid.

From where I stand, one consequence of *JFK* has been a revival of anticommunism (the theme of a conference once organized by Schaap and Ray). After my interview with Liebeler of the Warren Commission, *In These Times* published a page-long article announcing that this interview was the equivalent of the Nazi-Soviet pact, with Liebeler as A.H. and myself as J.V.S. In the private entertainment at the Royalton Hotel after the Town Hall panel, Stone asked Christopher Hitchens why I was attacking *JFK*. An honest, forthright response would have been "Because you made a terrible movie." But instead Hitchens replied that it was because I was "an unreconstructed Stalinist." Now Hitchens and his wife, Carol Blue—the woman he describes in print with revolting coyness as "Carol Azul"—are writing movie scripts, so I can understand his chumminess with Stone, but *In These Times*? I called up Jim Weinstein, *I.T.T.'s supremo*, to say that if he was going to publish this kind of stuff, he might at least send me the $1,500 in back payments he owes me. Weinstein said he didn't know the article was in that week's paper, and would I accept $1,000 for the time being. And when I think of all the years I forbore out of pity for its parlous condition from abusing *I.T.T.* for publishing John Judis! Let me end by evoking the conspiracy mindset in full deshabille. Weinstein *of course* has an interest in defending *JFK* because it draws attention away from the Mafia, infuriated at J.F.K. for his aborting the Bay of Pigs, which would have given the Mob back its real estate in Havana. Weinstein's dad was just such a real estate investor. Need I say more? *Alexander Cockburn*

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SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2382

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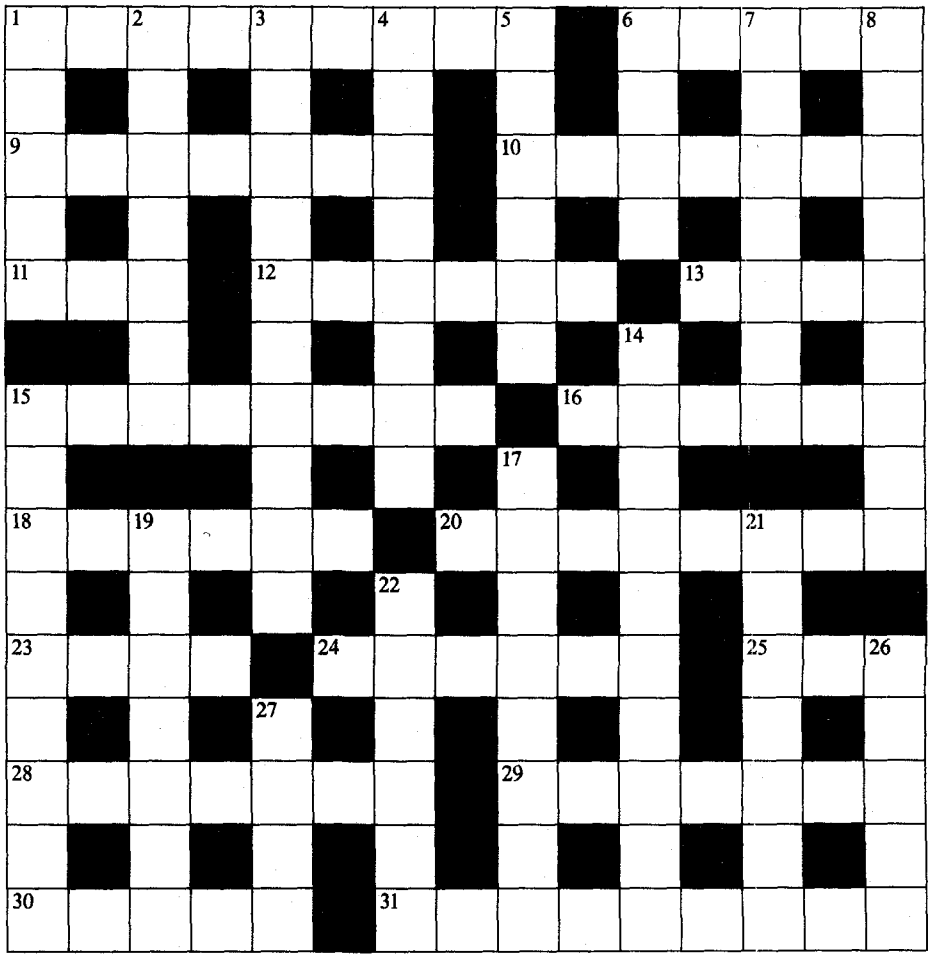
O	■	O	■	N	■	O	■	X	■	N	■	E	■	O
H	O	M	O	N	Y	M	■	P	I	L	G	R	I	M
N	■	B	■	U	■	E	■	I	■	O	■	G	■	D
N	O	I	S	E	S	■	B	R	O	C	C	O	L	I
Y	■	N	■	N	■	R	■	A	■	K	■	L	■	C
O	V	E	R	D	R	A	F	T	S	■	M	A	R	K
N	■	■	■	O	■	C	■	I	■	C	■	■	■	A
T	I	M	E	■	D	E	S	O	L	A	T	I	O	N
H	■	E	■	U	■	C	■	N	■	B	■	N	■	D
E	X	A	C	T	I	O	N	■	L	O	O	F	A	H
S	■	S	■	O	■	U	■	D	■	O	■	E	■	A
P	L	U	M	P	E	R	■	I	N	S	U	R	E	R
O	■	R	■	I	■	S	■	A	■	E	■	N	■	R
T	H	E	S	A	M	E	O	L	D	S	T	O	R	Y

Crossword Puzzle No. 2383

FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 It's as confused with possible housing cost around as a protester might be! (9)
6 and 4 down Implying someone such as the famous Bean could never be funny without having taken to drink! (5,2,1,5)
9 A girl certainly does get around and find a place to sit with her feller! (7)
10 A lousy trio performance, a too-restless audience might hear it read for the first time. (4,3)
11, 7 and 6 down Hit at close range, never by this, certainly. (3,2,1,4,4)
12 and 13 As the spectators used to say, "Kill 'im!" (6,4)
15 The tile game, possibly. (8)
16 Nothing happy in Paris could be caused by such a strange animal. (6)
18 One of them might be tender, but not quite sure in opposite points. (6)
20 Where the temporary offender is sometimes put at home, as they say. (8)
23, 25 and 24 Jessica's Cabot type on TV puts color on a gown's arrangement which might have got them going in the old West, (7,6)
28 Hurried with an incredulous reply, at one place where the paddles chunked! (7)
29 A reputedly busy place to get a once-stylish hairdo. (7)
30 Does it make the old sailor duck? (5)
31 Set Master straight? Not this way, according to the part of the Union. (9)

DOWN

1 To eat like a bird if one is greedy. (5)
2 One hopes to be up to it, if you have the itch to do it. (7)
3 Measures to keep things out of the wrong hands are sometimes this. (10)
4 See 6 across
5 Some broths can be made out of what sounds like beets. (6)
6 and 7 See 11 across
8 One could hold things to be so. (9)
14 One might when wise men come into view—they often carry cameras. (10)
15 The person healed by me turns out to be well-trimmed, in a possibly digital way. (9)
17 One hears it described as being an Atlantic or Pacific stone, if precious, or a romantic land (or a busy district.) (8)
19 The capital of Italy at one time needed 1 down to bring up the article. (7)
21 England, Scotland, Wales, etc., have a lot of water at one point in an area that wants to go it alone. (7)
22 How to make a man get with it might have its attraction. (6)
26 and 27 What it seeks to control might be a matter of habit. (5,4)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

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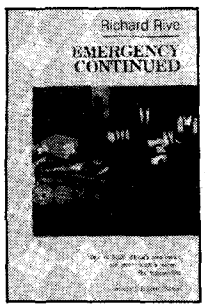

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